Fostering a Community of Practice: Teachers' Experience of a Blended Model of Professional Development

by

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ABSTRACT

Although sound professional development (PD) can positively influence teacher practice, many PD opportunities lack the support needed for teachers to explore and integrate new ideas into their practice over time. A group of six Late French Immersion teachers were presented with a PD opportunity designed to be blended, sustained, teacher-driven, grounded in practice and collaborative. The goal of the study was to describe participant experience with the PD opportunity. Data in the form of field notes, interview responses and participant logs was analyzed and twelve themes emerged. The PD opportunity was found to fulfil a specific need for the participants, who previously lacked opportunities to discuss and collaborate in a meaningful way to their teaching program. However, involvement with the online component use was sporadic, which was inconsistent with the participants' advocacy of its use. Despite this, participants found the overall experience as being valuable to their practice.

Keywords: Professional development; blended; teacher-driven; Communities of Practice

DEDICATION

To my parents, ***Christina Chu*** and ***Simon Chu***, who have supported me and encouraged me in all that I do.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Professional development is a term used to refer to the development of skills and knowledge with the goal of improving practice. In the educational field, professional development opportunities play a large role in the improvement of teaching practice (Guskey, 1986). Teacher involvement in professional development can lead to enhanced teaching and gains in student learning (Shroyer, Yahnke, Bennett, & Dunn, 2007). Schlager & Fusco (2004) describe ideal professional development as "a career-long, context specific, continuous endeavour that is guided by standards, grounded in the teacher's own work, focused on student learning, and tailored to the teacher's stage of career development" (124). Teacher change increases when a teacher participates in a community of learners, rather than through attendance at workshops (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002).

School districts offer a variety of professional development opportunities to their teachers, but involvement alone in professional development is not necessarily helpful in stimulating thought or improving practice. Professional development needs to fulfill several conditions to be useful. These conditions include the creation of an environment in which teachers are supported as they make pedagogical changes (Schlager & Fusco, 2004). The content covered in professional development also needs to be relevant to everyday teaching (Barab, MaKinster, Moore, & Cunningham, 2001). Schlager & Fusco (2004) explain that effective professional development involves more than training workshops, and

that there is little gain from programs that are not tied to practice. Teacher

practice and beliefs are more likely to change after witnessing differences in

student learning outcomes, such as the way students react to lessons (Clarke &

Hollingsworth, 2002). It becomes difficult to achieve these improvements in

student learning if teachers do not consistently apply or refine strategies or

lessons.

Many of the professional development opportunities offered to teachers

are limited to a small number of sessions, often ranging from one to four

meetings throughout the school year. Attendance varies from small groups of

teachers interested in the topic of discussion to larger groups where it can be

difficult to get to know everyone's name. With multiple sessions, teachers can be

inspired to apply concepts learned to their practice, but their enthusiasm may

wane until the next session is given. With few sessions, it is even more difficult

for teachers to incorporate new learning into their teaching. It is altogether too

easy to forget most of what is presented in a workshop, as Schlager & Fusco

(2004) and Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) explain. Even though the intent is to

provide teachers with the chance to further develop their practice, workshop

format professional development tends to shifts from teachers as the agents of

change in developing their own practice towards teachers being trained (Guskey,

1986).

Essentially, the professional development process that is frequently

undertaken in many school districts needs to support teachers further. The

problem lies not in the availability of resources or experts, nor does it lie in the

content presented, the variety of subjects, or the teachers involved. Rather, the participants need a way to continue exploring and adapting the material to which they are exposed after the formal sessions end.

What can we learn from research about supporting the development and application of teachers' learning to professional practice? As discussed above by Schlager & Fusco (2004) and Clarke & Hollingsworth (2002), professional development needs to be grounded in practice. The content and activities should be transferable from the professional development context to the classroom. Moreover, teachers need to feel like they have a solid handle on the material learned. This involves personal interest, time and discussion. It can be difficult for individual teachers to invest the time and the effort, even if they are truly interested in learning. There are often more pressing demands on teachers' time, such as preparing for the next day's lesson. As professional development does not have a deadline, it can be put off.

Collaboration is a way of supporting professional development so that it is sustained and teachers can better understand the depth of the material. Barab et al. (2001) discuss the benefits of collaboration and of situating learning in a context like that in which teachers practice. By ensuring that learning from professional development opportunities is situated, and therefore made more relevant, it becomes more probable that teachers will employ strategies and test beliefs from these sessions. The material learned can become more meaningful. The presence of collaboration with others contributes to keeping information

shared during professional development sessions fresh in the minds of teachers, and also further explored and elaborated on.

When looking at teacher collaboration as a means of improving professional development practice, it is useful to consider the idea of Wenger and Lave's theory of Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998). The term Community of Practice (CoP) refers to groups of people who are tied together by mutual engagement and joint enterprise. These groups are informal and involve the negotiation of meaning with others in the group (Wenger, 1998). Communities of Practice are included in an interactional framework for professional development proposed by Vrasidas & Zembylas (2004). The framework consists of three main ideas: constructivism, situated and distributed cognition and CoPs. CoPs include collaboration amongst members. Teachers wanting to further develop their practice could interact with, share and develop new ideas with other teachers who have similar goals. Discussion with fellow teachers also helps keeps material situated and applicable to the local classroom. This would shift professional development away from the workshop format and towards the underlying sense of the term, where teachers work towards developing and improving in their profession.

This thesis explored the fostering of a CoP within the context of a specific school district. At the time of the study, there were three separate schools providing the Late French Immersion (LFI) program, in which students begin learning French in sixth grade. The teachers of this program provided a unique program and had few opportunities to share, build and learn together. This was

problematic as the resources created for this program are few and the demand on students is very high. In Schools A and B, which are LFI only schools, there was one grade six teacher and one grade seven teacher. They were unable to collaborate to build units or develop lesson plans, as the seventh grade teacher cannot reuse these after the students have been taught the same lesson from their sixth grade teacher. The two teachers were able to discuss and compare the level of French that their students are demonstrating, but they were not able to compare their classes to other French classes. The LFI teachers at School C, a dual-track school, were more fortunate in that they had other French teachers to talk to and were able to see what other French classes are doing. However, the program and the rate at which the students in LFI move are very unique, rendering collaboration with same-grade teachers difficult. It can also be difficult for the LFI teachers to collaborate together, as both teachers teach the same students at some point. If one teacher uses a specific lesson in sixth grade, then it cannot be used in seventh grade.

There had been attempts by the LFI teachers to meet and collaborate to address these issues, but due to the limited number of professional growth days allotted to each teacher, these sessions had been rare. An expressed interest in building a CoP is not enough; a nurturing environment needs to exist for a CoP to occur (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). The teachers needed a means of moving towards a collaborative professional development experience together.

With issues of time and distance, meeting face-to-face was possible but not always an option. The intent of this research was to explore a blended model

of professional development as a possible solution to the some of the problems facing teachers developing their practice. As part of the Late French Professional Development (LFPD), teachers were provided with an opportunity to shape a blend of an online environment and face-to-face meetings. The focus was on how these teachers experienced the developmental stages of a potential CoP. This included the ways in which teachers felt that the LFPD related to or touched their practice, the role it played in their professional lives, and their relationships with other members.

The Study

This thesis study examined the ways in which teachers experienced the initial development of a CoP. The method was that of instrumental case study, where the research focussed on the ways in which the LFPD participants experienced the case of blended professional development. The thesis explored the experience of a blended, sustained, teacher-driven, grounded-practice and collaborative model professional development opportunity.

The research took place from October 2009 – June 2010 in an urban school district. Six teachers participated in the study. The data was collected through interviews, focus groups, face-to-face sessions and from documentation from the online environment.

While there are a number of studies that look at online environments for professional development, many of these focus on the characteristics of successful online environments. In this case, the intent was to understand how a

specific group of teachers felt about the provision of a nurturing environment for a CoP, with the blend of online environment and face-to-face meetings. Findings from this study can be shared with other teachers and administrators interested in understanding the successes and challenges of a young, developing CoP.

Overview of Thesis

Chapter two of this thesis includes a review of the literature about effective components of professional development. It also includes a description of the theoretical perspectives that played a role in this study, namely Wenger's theory of CoPs and of Vrasidas & Zembylas' framework for professional development that incorporates Wenger's theory of CoPs. Chapter three describes the theoretical perspectives about building for effective communication and the implications of these for the building of the LFPD experience. Chapter four describes the methods used for the study, including the rationale for the choice of case study. In addition to this, participants in the study, data collection, data analysis and issues of trustworthiness of the study are discussed. Chapter five presents the results of the study, and these results and conclusion are discussed in chapter six.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Key Aspects of Professional Development – A Review of the Literature

Clarke & Hollingsworth (2002) describe different perspectives of teacher change, suggesting that change as growth or learning underlies many of the current forms of professional development. With this perspective, change stems from teacher participation as a learner with a community of other learners. This ties in closely to the idea of professional development where the intent is to develop practice and skills. This is a shift away from the perspective of change as training, where professional development focuses on mastery of specific skills. These "one-shot" workshops where teachers were not the agents of change did not prove to be very effective at improving practice (Guskey, 1986). This is a problem, as many of the professional development opportunities that are provided end up falling into this category.

Professional development situations in which the teachers were the agents of change, making it teacher driven, have shown greater effects on practice. Shroyer et al. (2007) describe collaborative efforts between K-12 teachers and university faculty in examining a particular teacher-education program. The participants met face-to-face monthly and annually. The authors found support that indicated that participation in this process led to an increase in appreciation of experimentation and risk-taking, as well as improvements in student outcomes.

VanDeWeghe & Varney (2006) describe a teacher initiated study group that developed out of the desire to talk about their work. Initially, teachers videotaped themselves and discussed the tapes at monthly meetings, but eventually moved towards conducting experiments. During their fifth year, teachers were discussing readings and conducting research. There were a number of factors attributed to the success of the study group. Teachers were the driving force behind the professional development. They determined the direction of the inquiry and were the experts in the groups, rather than deferring to outside consultants as the experts. The evolution of focus in professional development was fostered by the encouragement of individual development. As the teachers observed and reflected on their own practice, positive change occurred more readily than before the collaboration.

In discussing their observations from the study group, VanDeWeghe and Varney (2006) highlight some key factors for professional development in this setting. The collaboration must be genuine and should be based on a goal of understanding, not finding quick fixes to problems. Moreover, teachers need the time to observe their own practice, to reflect and to meet with others.

It is not always feasible or practical to meet face-to-face. A possible alternative or addition to face-to-face professional development is online professional development. Researchers such as Barab (2001), Mouzakis (2008) and Holmes, Polhemus & Jennings (2005) have explored online and blended professional development, finding positive effects on professional practice from both.

Blended Professional Development

Professional development engagement options are not restricted to face-to-face or online alone. In cases where it is not practical to meet frequently in-person, but where participants want to prolong engagement with each other, a blend of face-to-face and online may be useful.

In fact, research has shown that the use of blended models can support discussion and collaborative learning, more so than face-to-face models. Through blended learning, participants are able to access more resources than they could through traditional means (Mouzakis, 2008). Mouzakis looked at a blended model of professional development for teachers interested in integrating technology into their practice. He found that teachers were very happy with the sense of community and the opportunities to discuss with others that developed as a result of the blended professional development. Moreover, most of the teachers had begun to incorporate technology into their daily practice, which was a main reason for participating in the blended professional development.

The Capital Area Technology and Inquiry in Education program (CATIE) started as a face-to-face program designed to assist teachers with the integration of technology into their practice (Holmes, Polhemus, & Jennings, 2005). Teachers and mentors would dedicate a large amount of time to work together. The program became too cost intensive, so they moved towards a blended model.

In the original model of CATIE, researchers found that teachers were reliant on their mentors. In the blended model of CATIE, teachers were given the

opportunity to be both learners and mentors to other teachers. Moreover,

teachers were able to engage in continuous dialogue, more so than would be

possible during face-to-face sessions. They could share experiences and reflect

on their own personal practice with others in a situated setting.

An Interactional Framework for Professional Development

Vrasidas & Zembylas (2004) propose a conceptual framework for online

professional development that consists of three different but interconnected

ideas: constructivism, situated and distributed cognition and communities of

practice. Vrasidas & Zembylas explain that these chosen dimensions highlight

the interactions of individuals and of groups in the professional development

process. The framework highlights important theories that promote stronger and

more effective professional development.

Constructivism is the epistemological belief that meaning is constructed

and does not exist alone without the learner (Vrasidas & Zembylas, 2004). There

are a variety of approaches to constructivism, with range of authors supporting

the different viewpoints. Phillips (1995) compares the different forms using a

framework that looks at three dimensions: the social political construction versus

the individual construction, the degree to which humans are the creators of

knowledge and finally, the active nature of construction.

Piaget is an author commonly tied to the view of individual construction of

knowledge. Phillips (1995) describes Piaget's work as depicting the child learner

as actively working alone to make sense of the world. On the other side of the

spectrum, Phillips explains that Lave and Wenger have work that focuses on the

social component of constructivism, with learning described as being constructed through social interaction in communities of practice.

Despite the differences in the approaches of the social constructivists and the individual constructivists, Vrasidas & Zembylas (2004) argue that, for their framework, both individual construction and social construction are important. Neither is in competition with the other; rather, the two are complementary ideas and that no true separating boundary exists. The important component of constructivism is the active construction of knowledge in both individuals and their social interactions. This active construction of knowledge is directly relevant to professional development, as it highlights the need for active learning opportunities for teachers. This idea of social interaction relates to collaboration amongst teachers in professional development.

Situated and Distributed Cognition is tied to the beliefs of constructivism. With the belief that learners create knowledge comes the idea that learning should be situated and that knowledge is distributed (Vrasidas & Zembylas, 2004). Brown, Collins & Duguid (1989) state that learning can be seriously limited if it is not situated in the appropriate context. He illustrates this by giving an example of vocabulary learned out of context, such as the grammatically correct but semantically nonsensical sentence, "Mrs. Morrow stimulated the soup." He explains that the accumulation of knowledge is similar to the acquisition of vocabulary. To truly understand an idea, it needs to be learned in authentic contexts so that the various nuances can be accessed and explored. The theory of situated cognition highlights the need to keep

professional development grounded in practice, so that teachers can best transfer and apply what they have learned.

Learning within a context is also important to distributed cognition. Distributed cognition refers to the idea that knowledge does not exist within one object or one being. Rather, it is found in different minds and artefacts in the world. Social interaction then becomes important within the context of distributed cognition, as knowledge can be distributed amongst the various participants and artefacts involved. This ties in with the need for collaboration amongst teachers engaging in professional development.

A Community of Practice, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, refers to a group of people who share a domain, community and practice. They are mutually engaged and share a joint enterprise and repertoire (Wenger, 1998). Vrasidas & Zembylas (2004) explain that, "Communities of practice have been theorized as sites of mutual learning and as important contributors to the success of knowledge dependent organizations," (page 3), the result being that it is an important component of a professional development model.

Communities of Practice

Communities of practice, one of the theories included in Vrasidas & Zembylas' (2004) framework, is an important foundation for this thesis due to the emphasis on collaboration and negotiation of meaning amongst members. Communities of practice, coined by Wenger and Lave, is a social theory of learning. Wenger (1998) describes communities of practice as "community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise," (p. 45).

Members of a community of practice participate in the negotiation of meaning through dialogue.

CoPs can come in a variety of forms; there is no set format for how often meetings take place or how they proceed. Despite this lack of structure, there are commonalities amongst CoPs. CoPs share three dimensions: mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998). Mutual engagement refers to the characteristic of common practice, which allows members of a community to participate in the negotiation of meaning of that practice. Stemming from this mutual engagement is joint enterprise, which refers to the negotiation of a community's understanding of their practice. This refers not to complete agreement amongst members, but to the fact that all members are part of the negotiation process. The third dimension of CoPs, shared repertoire, refers to the meanings given to actions, objects and words that are shared by the community. As with joint enterprise, these stem from the negotiation of meaning by members.

Mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire are all elements that can be tied to professional development. Participating teachers share a common practice, classroom teaching. Hopefully, through professional development, the teachers would feel comfortable discussing and negotiating meaning about their practice. Through discussion, teachers would engage in joint enterprise and would develop and refine a shared repertoire.

Wenger (1998) indicates that there are three identifiers of a CoP: domain, community and practice. The term domain refers to the shared interest of the

members in the communities, while the term community implies that having a common interest is not enough. Members need to interact, work and learn together to be a community. The term practice is used to reference the shared tools, resources and experiences that members of a CoP share, where knowledge is built through the sharing with others in the same practice.

CoPs differ from other forms of work groups in that they are formed from the bottom up, where membership involves self-selection. This highlights the importance of professional development being teacher driven. Moreover, members have more in common than just work goals; there is added passion and commitment driving their actions. The duration of the group is based more on the interest level of the group, not on the completion of a project or achievement of a goal (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Referring again to professional development, teachers who willingly meet out of interest are more likely to continue meeting than teachers who are focused on finishing a program or completing a lesson plan, leading to greater sustainability.

While discussing identity within a CoP, Wenger (1998) describes engagement, imagination and alignment as three modes of belonging to a CoP. Engagement is a term that refers to an individual's active participation in negotiation with the CoP. The term imagination is used to describe the individual's ability to move beyond the concrete, where the individual needs to explore connections between her own experiences and her world. When discussing an individual's efforts to partake in actions that contribute to a joint enterprise, the term alignment is used. These three modes of belonging are how

individual's come to shape their identity in a CoP. These three modes of belonging can be used to look at the ways in which participants are engaging in professional development, especially professional development that fosters the development of a CoP.

While CoPs as described by Wenger seems to be a good match for professional development, Schwen & Hara (2004) point out that little is known about how these CoPs come to maturity. Wenger describes CoPs that have already formed. The descriptions cannot serve as a how-to manual for the development of CoPs. There are factors individual to each group that determine the way it develops. However, by giving teachers space designed to promote collaboration, there is the potential for the formation of a young CoP.

Conclusion

The review of the literature in Chapter 2 highlights some of the strengths and weaknesses of different professional development forms. Short, disconnected opportunities for professional development do not yield the desired results. Others have found that longer-term opportunities, especially those involving participants who are actively working towards developing knowledge, have greater effects in the classroom. This active participation ties in well with Wenger's theory of CoPs, where members negotiate meaning and understanding.

CHAPTER 3: BUILDING FOR SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

Any form of professional development, whether in-person or online, needs to be useful for the participants. Research about the development, use and results of face-to-face, online and blended professional development opportunities is discussed in this section. The implications of these findings on the development of the Late French Professional Development (LFPD), the focus of this study, are discussed as well.

Dualities of Communities of Practice

Wenger describes four dualities of Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998). These dualities are tensions between needs, which both overlap and conflict with each other. Wenger's four dualities are: Participation/Reification; Designed/Emergent; Local/Global and Identification/Negotiation. Barab, MaKinster and Scheckler (2004) further described these dualities in the context of online environments and added two more: Online/Face-to-Face and Coherence/Diversity. These dualities need to be considered when trying to foster a CoP, whether the opportunity is face-to-face, blended or online.

Participation/reification refers to the tension between the creation of meaning through participation and the act of transforming the outcomes of participation into things. When discussing through a medium such as posts to forums, or documenting face-to-face discussions, reification occurs. While it is a necessity to record content to aid memory and communication, there are some

downsides. Sometimes, the act of creating and posting documents that reifies the knowledge stemming from discussions, both in online environments and in face-to-face environments, limits further negotiation of meaning. Online, forum posts can be read out of context and meaning can be misinterpreted. A balance between the participation and reification must be sought.

The issue of designed/emergent refers to the argument that communities emerge and cannot be designed, but that frameworks and support systems for the community are needed for growth and continuation. This ties to the idea of professional development being teacher driven. Top down agendas are likely less meaningful than emergent agendas. Barab et al. (2004) explain that with an online space, this duality can refer to more than the topics of discussion. It can also refer to the space used for the community. A space designed by the users is more likely to be valued. At the same time, we cannot expect members to fully design everything. Specific to the LFPD, the focus of this study, the teachers were presented with possible ways in which they may choose to structure their participation, such as a framework for online participation or potential topics of discussion. The teachers in this study were able to choose to incorporate these suggestions or to forge their own path for professional development.

The term local is used to refer to the individual practice, such as the practices of a teacher within her classroom. The term global reaches beyond the local, in this case, beyond that particular classroom, or that particular school. Challenges occur when looking at the difference between local practice and global relevance. Successful lessons may not be so successful in a context with

different goals, constraints or needs. Barab et al. (2004) point out that due to the nature of the job, teachers are primarily concerned with answers and lessons that are pertinent to their situations. The concept of local versus global is applicable to forum use and discussions. The responses are local, but lack the global context that may help others understand all the factors that are involved. In the case of the LFPD, the focus of this study, the teachers, while at different schools, share a common program. This may help keep the material or discussions shared relevant to the various LFPD participants.

Being part of a community involves identification, which is built through, "an investment of the self in relations of association and differentiation" (Wenger, 1998, page 188). New members need to identify with the community culture as well as the other members. Their identity affects the ways in which they interact with the community. Negotiation refers to a member's perception of their ability and authority to contribute to and guide the direction of a CoP. In a solely online environment, the anonymity factor needs to be considered. Members are able to decide how they want to represent themselves to others, including choosing to separate their online identity from their real life identity, which affects the way they are perceived and the types of interactions that may occur. On the other hand, in a blended environment, the members know each other. They are able to associate names with faces, positions and other knowledge they hold about each other. This has other implications for the ways in which the members may choose to interact. One of the aspects this may affect is the possibility of creating spaces for teachers with particular interests (e.g. a particular grade

level). This may limit the interaction that occurs amongst all members. In the case of this study, with the Late French professional development, the teachers were able to associate screen names with faces, potentially affecting the way teachers chose to represent themselves and the way they chose to interact.

The duality of online/face-to-face, as discussed by Barab et al. (2004) is tied to the dualities of local/global and designed/emergent. The move from local to global is potentially greater in an online community. Issues of trust emerge when moving to online spaces. A member may ask himself what the repercussions of sharing one's practice might be when putting it out there in cyberspace. The online community brings extra challenges. More time and effort needs to be vested in the design of an online space. Tools need to be easy to use and inviting to teachers. The space needs to be easy to navigate and conform to the needs and restrictions of school computers. Practically, in this study with the LFPD, this means that the site should be password protected and easy to navigate. Providing teachers the opportunity to organize the site facilitates this navigation.

Coherence, a commonality amongst members, is valuable in a CoP. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge and structure for diversity. A vital component of CoPs is the negotiation of meaning, which is more likely to occur if members have different perspectives and experiences. With the LFPD in this study, both the face-to-face environment and the online environment needed to foster the sharing of these varied viewpoints but also encourage a culture in which this is valued.

Communities of Practice and Technology

Several researchers have looked at the involvement of technology to aid in collaboration during the professional development process. With this desire in mind, Barab et al. (2001) created an Inquiry Learning Forum (ILF) in which teachers could have meaningful interactions with other teachers. The ILF was designed to support a community of practitioners as they improved their practice. Teachers shared videos of their practice and were encouraged to discuss with others, observe and evaluate other teachers as well as reflect on their own practice. The members of the ILF said that a benefit of participating in the forum was that of an increased appreciation for other teacher perspectives. However, several drawbacks were noted. Time was an important factor: it took time to upload the videos for sharing and it was difficult to persuade teachers to watch and evaluate other members' work. It was also difficult to ensure that the discussions were in line with the goal of inquiry-based teaching. An even larger difficulty was that of fostering a community. Although the structures for collaboration were in place, more steps needed to be taken to garner trust and build a culture of critical inquiry.

In another study including the ILF, the authors (Makinster, Barab, Harwood, & Andersen, 2006) looked at the ways in which the ILF changed pre-service teachers' experiences of reflection. The participating pre-service teachers were separated into one of three groups. One group involved the use of a private journal, with no social context. Another group participated in an asynchronous forum while the final group participated in the ILF community of

teachers. The authors found that the group that participated in the ILF placed greater value on the assignment and the reflection process than did the other groups. These participants enjoyed the conversation and getting responses from practicing teachers, which highlights the benefits of providing space for discussion and collaboration.

In an in-depth study at the combination of technology and collaboration, Schwen & Hara looked at four case studies of CoPs (2004). These CoPs ranged greatly in their formation, their function and their interactions. One of the case studies involved defense lawyers who supported each other. Although the group was an example of a successful CoP, the technology available to them did not seem to add anything to their interactions. Experts in technology and CoP design for a Fortune 50 company created another case, dubbed the "Expensive CoP". In this case, participation waned and the CoP was eventually abandoned. The same lack of interest in designed tools was present in the third case, where a mature CoP did not develop. The fourth case also involved expensive technology, but researchers found that the tools were not being used as expected. Participants were hesitant to partake in typical CoP behaviours, such as negotiating meaning and sharing stories. With expensive technology and knowledgeable designers, it would be worth questioning why CoPs and technology don't seem to mix in these case studies. Schwen & Hara present some cautionary notes about combining the two. They point out that Wenger's theory is a descriptive one and is not intended for use as a prescription for the creation of CoPs. Moreover, Wenger described communities that were already

formed. Little is known of the evolution of a CoP, and how a developing group becomes a mature CoP. A part of this is participant motivation. There is a large difference between groups in which members opt to participate in collaboration and groups of people who become part of the group unwillingly.

Schwen & Hara (2004) also point out the theoretical differences between possessing knowledge versus knowledge in practice. Wenger's CoP theory involves knowing in practice, where members discuss and find solutions to problems. In some cases of the developing CoPs, the push is to possess knowledge. Quite often, the push in collaborative communities is to complete a task or to create a product. It is less likely that there will be positive results when the expectation of the collaboration is inconsistent with the ideas behind collaboration (Hewitt, 2004). In his study of Knowledge Forum software, Hewitt states that the software alone is not enough. There has to be a match with the goal of learning.

Koku & Wellman (2004) looked at a scholarly community with the goal of understanding the networks of members within it. They looked at the size of the network, but also the way people interacted within it. This includes the centrality of members, including in-degree centrality, where members of high in-degree centrality are high in prestige and are sought after for advice or discussions, and of out-degree centrality, which looks at the number of people contacted. There is also betweenness centrality, a measure of how a member connects or facilitates communication between two other members who are not connected. The authors also looked at the density of the group, which refers to the frequency of

contact, and the strength of the ties between people. The findings from the study suggest that there is much variation in networks: members have different roles and different levels of involvement. The tools used for communication affected the structure of relationships. For example, email serves to share information with peripheral members of a community, whereas face-to-face connects both active and peripheral members. Koku & Wellman suggest that designers of social networks look at the internal structure of the members in order to best facilitate discussion.

Vrasidas & Zembylas (2004) explain that the nature of a program should allow for the construction of knowledge in a community-driven way, where knowledge is situated and distributed. When Vrasidas & Zembylas used their framework to examine two different online professional development programs, they found that they had learned several lessons. For one, participants need to feel ownership over the program, which can be promoted by participant opportunities to provide input for structure, goals and assessment of the professional development. Participants also need to interact and collaborate. These lessons learned are closely in line with the idea of constructivism. Related to the key ideas from situated cognition is the lesson learned of the inclusion of authentic tasks and activities, rendering the professional development relevant to the workplace. Opportunities for cognitive apprenticeship are closely tied to distributed cognition. These ideas are also tied to CoPs, as well as the importance of regular feedback. The authors also found that the choice of

technological tool is also vital to the process of creating online professional development, as is the use of a variety of assessment and evaluative tools.

In another paper, Charalambos, Michalinos, & Chamberlain (2004) discuss the lessons that they have learned while developing online opportunities for professional development through STAR (Supporting Teachers with Anywhere/Anytime Resources). Their article outlines components of successful communities and recommendations for planning, use and facilitation. The components of successful communities fall in line with the needs of a CoP. For example, the members need to feel safe and supported. They also need to feel like they share a vision with the other members, strengthening the feel of community. Moreover, members need to know what their role is, what they are expected to do and feel a sense of responsibility towards the online community. Also in line with their framework is the need for regular feedback.

Several accounts of blended professional development highlight the importance of feedback and discussion to participants. In one study, participants were more engaged and felt more commonality when relationships where mutually maintained via discussions. Both accountability and social engagement were factors in the way the blended model was perceived (Henderson, 2007). Mouzakis (2008) also reported that contact with peers was important. In fact, the participants said that they would have preferred to meet more than the two times they did during the study. They also reported that the role of the facilitator was important. In the CATIE study, the authors explain that the blended model

helped situate the learning in the context of a supportive learning community (Holmes, Polhemus, & Jennings, 2005).

Many of the recommendations from different studies push developers to consider the type of tool selected for online development. The members need to exchange ideas and resources and work together using a system that accommodates a variety of actions, such as file sharing, joint document creation and discussion, and is easy to master. Equally as important as the tool selected for use is the incentive to take part in the professional development. This includes giving ownership to the participants as well as considering issues such as incentives and compensation for participation and gaining commitment to the community. Designers should also consider ways of inviting discussion amongst community members to foster the development of a CoP.

Schlager & Fusco (2004) share some of their findings from their work with Tapped In, a virtual environment for educators. They provided eight guideposts to consider when creating an online environment, as illustrated in Table 3.1. These guideposts reflect much of the research discussed above.

Table 3.1: Schlager & Fusco's Guideposts

Eight Guideposts for Technology Design	
Guidepost 1	Learning Processes • Provides of an environment that meets the needs of the community
Guidepost 2	History and Culture • Allows for the establishment of norms and artifacts
Guidepost 3	Membership Identity and Multiplicity • Supports the development of member identity and functioning in multiple roles
Guidepost 4	Community Reproduction and Evolution • Allows for growth, evolution and reproduction of membership
Guidepost 5	Social Networks • Understands and assesses the social roles within the network
Guidepost 6	Leaders and Contributors • Enables any member to take on a leadership role
Guidepost 7	Tools, Artifacts, and Places • Carefully considers the tools, artifacts and places used within the online environment
Guidepost 8	The Practice • Provides for a collective enterprise

Note: Guideposts are from Schlager & Fusco (2004).

Building the LFPD for this study

Practically, what does this all mean? When building the online and the face-to-face components of the LFPD for this study, there is much to consider. Deriving from many of the findings reported in the research, the LFPD was designed to be blended, sustained, teacher-driven, grounded in practice, and collaborative.

In this particular case, the participants were teachers at separate locations. Meeting face-to-face frequently was not practical. This issue had two main possible solutions: online professional development and blended professional development. While researchers have shown that online

professional development can contribute to improved practice (Barab et al. 2001), there are also benefits to blended professional development. In fact, participants have stated that more face-to-face sessions would have enhanced their experience with a blended model of professional development (Mouzakis, 2008). In this study, participants were given the opportunity to try meeting face-to-face as well as working together online. They all met face-to-face every six weeks. The timeframe given was structured to better match teachers' busy lives while still ensuring regular contact. The online space was avaliable for teacher use, which could help sustain discussions and contact in between meetings.

One shot workshops have been described as ineffective at changing teacher practice (Guskey, 1986) and a number of studies that describe effective professional development experiences involve sustained interactions (VanDeWeghe & Varney, 2006, Schwen & Hara, 2004). In CoPs, the community aspect involves members taking part of the group. While there is no formula describing how long a CoP needs to meet – or how often – negotiation of meeting needs to take place (Wenger, 1998). For this thesis study, the LFPD lasted nine months consisting of five face-to-face meetings. With the addition of the online space, teachers had the option to maintain contact with other teachers. With a longer timeframe, it was possible to see how teachers participated in the LFPD as schedules changed.

Teacher-driven professional development, where teachers themselves are the agents of change, often leads to increased participation and investment (Shroyer et al. 2007, VanDeWeghe & Varney, 2006). Moreover, CoPs are

strongest when formed from the bottom-up (Wenger, 1998). The teachers in this study had expressed a desire to collaborate, but had not found a means of doing so. They were already interested in partaking in such an opportunity. In the study, the LFPD teachers dictated the direction of their professional development in both online and face-to-face settings. During an initial face-to-face meeting, the teachers had an opportunity to discuss their interests and their expectations for the LFPD. Through this discussion, the teachers created the agenda for future meetings. The teachers also had a leadership role in the use of the online space. Although the address and the basic framework for the online environment were in place before initial contact, the teachers created logins and then collectively added to and organized the space during the first meeting. As with the the face-to-face meetings, the teachers also determined the agenda and usage of the online space.

Another important aspect of the LFPD in this study was that it be grounded. Many authors have cited the importance of grounded practice (Vrasidas & Zembylas, 2004, Schwen & Hara, 2004). The intent in this study was to increase the usefulness of the material covered in the LFPD. Teachers tend to refer to their own practice when presented with new material. If the material is useful, the participants have more motivation to continue participating in the professional development. The fact that the teachers shared a similar practice allowed for much common ground when it came to discussions. The exact manifestation of this was dependent on how the teachers chose to structure the LFPD meetings. Some possible ways that teachers could have

chosen to use the Late French Professional Development time were sharing stories, sharing lesson plans, collaborating on units and reflecting together about their practice.

Collaboration was another important aspect of the Late French Professional Development. The CoP theory was selected because of it's emphasis on members working together and negotiating meaning. In the LFPD, teachers were given the opportunity to collaborate during face-to-face meetings and through the online space. Again, the act of collaborating, and the choice of what to collaborate on, was left up to the teachers to decide. Possible foci of collaboration included furthering material discussed in other professional development activities, unit plans and expectations for the levels taught.

Online Specifics for this Study

Following the recommendations about online environments, the tool that was used for the online component, Moodle, is customizable and provides options for organization. The following section outlines the reasons why this tool was selected.

1) It is password protected, which addresses the issue of trust and security. Participants can feel secure in knowing who can access their contributions. They can also feel secure in knowing whom they are interacting with.

2) Multiple people can be administrators. In giving administrative rights to all the members, the teachers are all able to aid in the design of the website.

Moreover, members are able to make changes that they see fit to improve their experience with the online space.

3) It allows for a variety of interactions. Moodle has multiple functions, such as forums, chats, polls, lessons and file sharing capacities. Participants are able to pick and choose from these functions, selecting functions that are useful to the group.

4) It allows for the creation of a group culture. Moodle itself does not come with a pre-packaged idea of how it should run. The group can develop it's own culture and history through usage.

The use of the tool depended on the participants. As previously mentioned, there are multiple functions within Moodle for the participants to use. Participants had the option to discuss their practice through forums or chats. They could also choose to create and share lesson plans using the file sharing capacities. Participants could choose to create a databank of knowledge using the wiki functions, or share opinions using polls.

Potential Benefits/Outcomes of the Study

Potential benefits of using the tools provided were that teachers might have a means of communicating and collaborating with other teachers, as well as a way of accessing or sharing new ideas and lesson plans. The discussion regarding teacher practice or styles may contribute to improved teaching practice.

A benefit from the study could be an increased understanding of the needs and then challenges of using a blended model for professional development. This includes the potential to enrich knowledge of needs for both the online environment and the face-to-face environment in professional development.

Research Questions

The intent of the research was to understand how teachers experienced the LFPD. The focus on trying to ensure that the LFPD was blended, sustained, teacher-driven, grounded in practice and collaborative was meant to encourage the development of a CoP. Therefore, the overarching research question was "How do teachers experience a blended, sustained, teacher-driven, grounded in practice and collaborative professional development opportunity?" Sub-questions were:

1. What types of interactions did teachers engage in as part of the LFPD?
    a. How did interactions change or evolve for both the online and face-to-face LFPD?
    b. How did the online and face-to-face LFPD influence interactions with other LFPD members?
    c. What did teachers view as productive or unproductive interactions for both the online and face-to-face LFPD?
    d. How did teachers engage with the tools provided to them with the online LFPD?

2. What value did teachers feel they experienced from the LFPD…
    a. socially?
    b. practically?
    c. theoretically?

3. What challenges emerged from the LFPD…
    a. socially?
    b. practically?
    c. theoretically?

The purpose of the study was to describe teacher experience as richly as possible. The first group of sub questions targets the way in which interaction developed as participants delved into the possible nurturing of a CoP. It also looks at the ways in which participants viewed their experience with the face-to-face and online components.

The second and third groups of sub questions seek to describe the ways in which the LFPD affected the LFPD participants in different aspects of their lives. Professional development should contribute positively in some way to participant experience, whether in day to day practice, socially or in an academic sense. An experience like that of the LFPD is also bound to present challenges to LFPD participants as well. To best convey participant experience, both the successes and the challenges of the LFPD need to be described in depth.

Conclusion

There are a number of considerations when developing professional development opportunities. Some of these are specific to either face-to-face professional development or online professional development, but most are pertinent to both. A blended model was used for this study, for theoretical and practical reasons. The LFPD, in addition to being blended, was created with the intention of it being sustained, teacher-driven, grounded in practice and collaborative.

The next chapter describes the methods used in this study, the participants and the setting, as well as the data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER 4: METHODS

This study was non-experimental in nature, as there were no control or treatment groups, and focused on the way in which teachers experienced the online professional development that they created and in which they participated. The teachers participating in the study were LFI teachers working in the same district. The study took place from October 2009 to June 2010. The collected data included research field notes of meetings, interviews with LFPD participants and participant logs.

In this chapter, I explain the choice of case study for this study. Following this, I describe the setting and the participants. Next, I describe the data collection. Finally, I will discuss issues of trustworthiness.

Rationale for Methodology

Creswell (1998) states that there should be a strong rationale for choosing to undertake a qualitative study. He describes eight reasons for selecting a qualitative course of inquiry, illustrated in table 4.2.

Table 4.1: Reasons for Conducting Qualitative Research

Reasons for Conducting Qualitative Research According to Creswell	
Reason 1	Research questions focus on describing instead of comparing groups.
Reason 2	Topic needs to be explored.
Reason 3	There is a need to present a detailed view of topic.
Reason 4	Participants are being studied in their natural setting.
Reason 5	Style of writing is more narrative.
Reason 6	There is sufficient time and resources for data collection.
Reason 7	Audiences will be receptive to qualitative research.
Reason 8	Emphasizes researchers role as an active learner instead of expert.

Note: Reasons are from Creswell, J. W. (1998). Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design - Choosing Among Five Traditions. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc, pp. 17-18.

In this particular case, the research focussed on gaining a better understanding of how the teachers understood and felt about their participation within the bounded case of the blended professional development experience. The use of *how* and *what* in the research questions is more exploratory in nature. The intent was not to find the cause and effect of the blended professional development, but to explore participant experiences in a natural setting over an extended period of time. Teachers participating in this study had different views and experiences with a model such as the LFPD, depending on their background, their interests and their views on professional development. Rather than trying to generalize about how teachers felt about the LFPD, it was more useful to focus on these particular teachers in this particular situation. The duration of the study extended over several months, allowing the participants to gain a richer experience of the blended professional development and allowing me, as the researcher, more time to explore participant experiences.

There are several traditions of qualitative study that could have been used for this study; namely, action research, phenomenology and case study. Action research is used with the intent to garner information about and improve a particular component of education. It is a research design used by teachers in educational settings. The process involves reflection about a problem, followed by data collection. After analyzing the data, educators implement changes based on their findings (Creswell J. W., 2005). In the study at hand, teachers were presented with an alternative to common professional development processes. The blended model of professional development was a response to a problem;

however, the process being followed did not match that of action research. In my research, I focused on how the participants felt about the case presented. I did not seek to delve into the problems of the current mode of professional development, nor did I wish to compare the results of current and blended professional development. Moreover, action research often involves a teacher looking at his or her own practice. In this case, the focus was not on my practice in the classroom, but on professional development. Despite my taking action by participating in research in an educational field, action research was not an ideal design for this study.

Phenomenological studies focuses on a group's or a person's experiences with a phenomenon. The researcher examines the lived experiences of the participants and attempts to portray the essence of the experience to readers. In the process of doing this, the researcher must bracket her preconceived notions about the phenomenon in order to focus on the participant experience (Creswell, 1998). While the focus of my study was on participant experience, this study sought to understand other aspects as well. In addition to exploring the phenomenon of the teachers experience with the LFPD, I was looking at the ways in which the teachers create and participate in it. This included looking at the various tools employed during online usage and the transfer of learning or discussion from the LFPD to everyday practice. In this way, the study looked at participant experience as well as the practicality of the LFPD model. Moreover, bracketing preconceived notions was not reasonable in the case. The LFPD

model is a response to the assumption that current professional development practices are not as functional as could be.

A case study is the study of a system "over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). Stake (1995) explains that a case can be one person or a group of people, if there is boundedness present. It is a design that allows for the study of a unique cases bound by time, place or physical boundaries. Miles & Huberman (1994) describe the case as being the focus, or the heart, of the study. They explain that a case may be multiple things: an individual, a role, a group or organization, a community, or even a nation. It could also be an event or a process. Moreover, cases can be defined spatially or temporally.

There are a number of types of case studies that vary by the focus (such as intrinsic or instrumental), the number of cases studied (single or collective) and the sites studied (multi-site or within-site). An *intrinsic case study* is the study of an unusual case, where the researcher has an intrinsic interest in the case. An *instrumental case study* differs from this, as the focus is on learning more about an issue or theme by studying the case. These are both examples of *single case studies* because only one case is being studied. *Collective case studies* are where several cases are studied to gain a better understanding of an issue (Creswell, 2005). The case studies may occur at one site (*within site*) or at different physical locations (*multi-site*). While doing case studies, researchers review multiple sources of information, including interviews, observations, audio-visual materials, physical artifacts and documents (Creswell, 1998).

This study was an instrumental case study, where the issue at hand was how the teachers experienced the creation and participation in a blended model. The case was that of a group of teachers participating in a professional development opportunity intended to be blended, sustained, teacher-driven, grounded in practice and collaborative. It was bounded spatially by the school district, and was multi-sited, as the teachers worked at different locations. The online environment was yet another site where the teachers could work and meet. The case was bounded temporally by the time frame of the professional development opportunity, October 2009 to June 2010. All the teachers who consented to participate were part of the case study. There was no random sampling or search for extreme cases. Rather, the intent of this study was to understand how they all experienced the LFPD. As the number of participants in the case was quite small, all were included to gain a stronger insight into participant views.

The case study was also exploratory in nature, so the instrumentation used was open-ended. The intent was to provide rich description. Data was collected through a focus group and a semi-structured interview. Information was also gathered through participant logs.

Setting and Participants

The setting of this study involved three schools in one urban school district in Western Canada. The schools are elementary schools that offer the Late French Immersion program to students in grade 6 and 7.

The LFPD participants were provincially certified teachers who specialize in teaching this program. At the outset of the study, the teachers had a range of zero to eight years teaching this particular program at different schools. Five teachers participated in this study. These five teachers had previously expressed an interest in undertaking some form of collaboration. Had these teachers declined to be part of the study, they would still have been welcome to take part in the LFPD online environment and in the LFPD face-to-face meetings. There were two grade seven teachers, Barb and Dean, and three grade six teachers, Alice, Carol and Diana. The names used are all pseudonyms.

As a LFI teacher, I took part in both the face-to-face sessions and the online collaboration. My role in this was that of "participant observer". I provided the space in which the LF teachers could design their online environment. I also scheduled the initial focus group and facilitated the choice of dates for the following face-to-face meetings. I participated in both the online and the face-to-face LFPD. I facilitated discussions at times, but did not dictate the direction of collaboration. For example, when LFPD participants were unsure of topics they wanted to discuss, I provided some possible options.

In order to participate, LFPD participants signed a document indicating that they had read and agreed with the ethical requirements as stipulated by the Ethics Department of Simon Fraser University. Participation was on a voluntary basis and LFPD participants may have requested to leave the study at any point and consequently any data collected from them would have been destroyed. A

copy of the Ethics Approval Letter is included as Appendix A. When I refer to the

LFPD participants, pseudonyms are used in place of their real names.

Interactions

LFPD participants interacted in face-to-face meetings and in an online

environment that was set up to foster collaboration. LFPD participants met five

times for face-to-face meetings. Teachers determined the agenda of these

meetings based on collective interest. These face-to-face meetings were

observed. LFPD participants also had the opportunity to interact with each other

in the online space that they organized, from October 2009 to June 2010.

The online environment used initially was Moodle, an open-source

learning management system. All LFPD participants were given administrative

rights to the online environment. Members did the initial set-up during the LFPD

launch, where the group collectively decided what tools to include and what the

site should look like. The online space was password protected to ensure

security of content. After five months, a blog site was introduced and used

instead of Moodle to simplify online use. A Wordpress blog that was closed to

search engines, but still visible to anyone who knew how to find the address, was

selected. As the administrator of the blog, I created usernames and passwords

for the LFPD participants. LFPD participants needed to be logged in to

Wordpress in order to make posts or add comments to existing posts on the blog.

At the end of the study, the LFPD participants were interviewed. After

analysis was done on data collected, LFPD participants were contacted for

member checks that included having LFPD participants review the results and

discussion chapters. I then discussed the LFPD participants' feelings about my

analysis on a one-to-one basis to ensure that I justly portrayed their experiences.

Overview of Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection and analysis are introduced in this section. Data was

collected from three main sources: field notes of meetings and the focus group,

participant logs and participant interviews.

Table 4.2: Data Collection Type

Data Type	Data Collected	Source of Evidence
Observation	Field notes of face-to-face meetings	Field notes journal
Interviews	Interview Responses	Audio recording Interview notes
Documents	Excerpts Logs	Moodle database Participant journals

Table 4.3: Data Collection Timetable

Timeframe	Interactions	Data Collected
October	Face-to-face #1 Focus group Planning time	Observation Focus group responses Participant logs
	Online use	
November	Face-to-face #2 Participant logs	Observation Participant logs
	Online use	
January	Face-to-face #3 Participant logs	Observation Participant logs
	Online use	
February	Face-to-face #4	Observation Participant logs
	Online use	
April	Face-to-face #5	Observation
	Online use	
June	Individual interviews	Interview responses Participant logs Participant selected excerpts

Focus Group and Planning Meeting

The initial meeting with LFPD participants was in the form of a focus group. During this meeting, LFPD participants had the opportunity to discuss their expectations of the LFPD and set the course of future meetings. During this period, LFPD participants shared past experiences with professional development, including elements that they felt to be essential or unnecessary to include in the LFPD, and their thoughts and beliefs about professional development. This focus group was also an opportunity for LFPD participants to meet or reacquaint themselves with one another.

After the focus group, LFPD participants had a chance to explore and organize the online component of the LFPD.

Following Meetings

At the following meetings, the LFPD participants followed an agenda that they created online, prior to the meeting. The meetings started with all six LF teachers sharing stories and discussing topics common to all members. After this initial discussion, the teachers broke into grade groups. Each grade group consisted of three teachers who decided how they wanted to use their time together. Both groups of teachers remained in the same room during these meetings. Often, this time was dedicated to sharing resources, talking about lessons or creating units together. After each meeting, LFPD participants were

given the participant logs to complete. I wrote down my observations of the meeting in the form of field notes after leaving each meeting.

Participant Logs

LFPD participants were asked at the outset of the study to respond to a participant log. In this log, LFPD participants recorded their thoughts after face-to-face meetings. LFPD participants were provided with a list of questions that they may have wished to address, including elements that they found valuable or useless or interesting points of discussion. These logs were used as a springboard for discussion during interviews. They also served as a way for LFPD participants to keep track of their thoughts at all stages of the study.

Participant Selected Excerpts

Originally, the LFPD participants were going to be asked to select excerpts from the online sites that were meaningful to them in some way. The online sites were not used very often, and when they were, it was typically to confirm meetings or to share lesson plans. Because of this, the LFPD participants were not asked to select excerpts.

Participant Interviews

These were conducted at the teachers' places of work. Each participant was interviewed once after nine months of participating. The interview was semi-structured. The focus of this was to see how the teachers had experienced the online professional development environment. Questions for the interview were

informed in part by the responses provided by the LFPD participants in their participant logs and from their interactions during the face-to-face meetings.

Member checks

Member checks were done after data was analyzed. I took my interpretations back to the LFPD participants for their review to ensure that I was fully describing their thoughts.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that there are four conventional criteria for studies: "truth value", applicability, consistency and neutrality. They then explain that these criteria are not appropriate for all forms of inquiry. For example, "truth value" is how "true" the findings are, based on the participants and the setting of the study. This criterion is focused on one truth, which does not fit into a study such as this, where I sought to thoroughly document participant experience. There were multiple ways in which participants might have experienced the LFPD.

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba propose the term credibility instead of "truth value". Credibility is the adequate representation of multiple constructions. In order to establish credibility, Lincoln and Guba propose five techniques (1985): activities increasing the probability that credible findings will be produced, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy and member checks. The first, activities increasing the probability that credible findings will be produced,

includes prolonged engagement, persistent observation and triangulation. All three of these were employed in this study to increase credibility. I engaged in prolonged engagement by meeting with the LFPD over the course of a school year, building trust and being able to better understand how the participants experienced the LFPD. Persistent observation is the identification of relevant elements on which to focus, rather than gathering data on anything and everything. With the LFPD study, the research questions were laid out in advance, providing me a framework to work within, although the questions were open to change if needed. Triangulation is the inclusion of different sources, methods, investigators or theories. In this study, triangulation was done with multiple sources of information: participant interviews, focus group responses, participant logs and field notes of observations.

Peer debriefing, in which the researcher works with a peer separate from the study, was done only in that I discussed analysis and results with my supervisor.

Referential adequacy refers to the collection of data using recordings. Voice recordings were used during interviews, but not during the face-to-face meetings.

Member checks are a way for the researcher to ensure that her understanding of the data is representative of how the participants feel. In this study, I was able to informally perform member checks during interviews. I brought up past comments participants had made in their participant logs to ensure that I understood the participants' meaning. I also rephrased some

comments made during the interview, where participants could confirm or disconfirm my understanding of their experience. More formal member checks, as previously described, were done after the data was analyzed.

Negative case analysis was not used, as the goal of the study was to describe LFPD participant experiences, not to form hypotheses.

Transferability

Rather than use the term applicability, Lincoln and Guba (1985) use transferability. Transferability refers to the applicability of findings from a study to other contexts or other subjects. To ensure that there was transferability in this study, thick description was provided so that people can make decisions about the transferability of findings to their own situation.

Dependability

Dependability is a term that is used to refer to the consistency of the findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) make the argument that there is no credibility without dependability. Using the "overlap method" of triangulating, as in this study, is a way of demonstrating validity, or credibility, thus helping demonstrate dependability. By looking at data from more than just one source, such as interviews, I was able to demonstrate that the conclusions I come to stem from multiple sources of data.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings are unbiased and confirmable, rather than using the term neutrality. With regards to confirmability,

I have a trail that could potentially be audited, included raw data, field notes, findings, conclusions and my final report. I also positioned myself as participant-observer.

Coding and Analysis

The data analysis procedure being followed in this study comes from Auerbach and Silverstein's *Qualitative Data, An Introduction to Coding and Analysis* (2003), in which phases of coding are used. Auerbach & Silverstein are associated with grounded theory. In this study, the focus was on understandings that emerged from the data, to which their method lends itself well. Instead of testing a hypothesis, the focus was on developing hypotheses based on the data collected.

Data was gathered from researcher observations, participant logs and interviews. The researcher observations and participant logs were done after face-to-face meetings. There were a total of five face-to-face meetings that were all fully attended, although no participant logs were done after the fifth meeting. This is because the teachers assembled but stated that they were too tired and busy at that time in the year to truly hold a meeting. Before concluding the meeting, I explained that I would be contacting them for interviews, but no professional development took place.

In between this final face-to-face meeting and the commencement of the interviews, the relevant text was extracted from researcher observations and participant logs. The relevant text was then sorted into general categories, which

emerged from the data. Within these general categories, repeating ideas were found and then organized into themes. The findings from this round of data analysis were used to inform the questions that were asked during the interviews.

After the interviews, the process of finding relevant text was repeated. The relevant text from interviews was sorted into the general categories that emerged during the first round of data analysis after the face-to-face meetings. As with the data from the first round, repeating ideas were found within the general categories and then organized into themes.

Relevant Text

The first stage of data analysis was to identify relevant text from researcher observations, participant logs and interviews (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). For both the first and second round of data analysis, this search for relevant text was done by hand. Colour coding of the paper was used to ensure that the texts could be matched back to the original data source. The relevant text came from researcher observations, participant logs and from interview data, and was in the form of phrases, sentences or groups of sentences. There were 80 incidences of relevant text coming from the participant logs and researcher observations and 122 incidences coming from the interviews.

Repeating Ideas

After identifying the relevant text, the relevant text was then coded by hand for repeating ideas. Relevant text from researcher observations and participant logs were grouped into one or more categories of general categories

and then into repeating ideas. The general categories emerged from the data, and consisted of headings to help organize information, such as "Professional Development" or "Isolation". After the first round of data analysis, there were nine general categories. These general categories were used to facilitate sorting the data. Within each of these broad concepts, ideas were organized further into repeating ideas. For example, within the general category of "Professional Development", the relevant text was then sorted into repeating ideas and given descriptors, such as "Priceless Professional Development" and "Missing Options". After coding the participant logs and researcher observations for the four LFPD meetings, there were 20 repeating ideas. There were also three orphan ideas that did not fit into categories of repeating ideas, but seemed to contain important ideas that required follow-up during interviews.

After the interviews, the relevant text was then sorted using the aforementioned general categories. As the relevant text was organized, two more general categories emerged: "Group Dynamics" and "Moving Forward". Once the relevant text was completely sorted into the general categories, the relevant text from the both the first round and second round of data analysis was then regrouped into repeating ideas. For example, under the general category of "Professional Development", the two repeating ideas that emerged during the first round of data analysis remained, but a third was added: "Target Specific". During this process, the three orphan ideas were integrated into the repeating ideas. After this process, there were a total of 33 repeating ideas in the 11 categories that emerged.

Organizing Themes

Auerbach & Silverstein explain that the next phase is to organize the repeating ideas into themes (2003). This process was done by hand. To start, one of the 33 repeated ideas was selected as a focus. The remaining repeating ideas were compared with this to see if they fit into themes. This process was repeated using the other repeating ideas as a focus. The themes found were given simple descriptors for organizational purposes. These themes differed from the general category and the repeating ideas in that they were more specific. A previously given example of a general category was, "Professional Development, while three previously given examples of repeating ideas were "Priceless Professional Development", "Missing Options" and "Target Specific". These were then combined to form a theme, or assertion that, the "LFPD fulfils a specific need for the Late French teachers, who previously lacked opportunities to discuss, share and collaborate." Prior to doing interviews, there were 10 themes. After incorporating the interview data into the repeating ideas, the repeating ideas were again sorted into themes. Two new themes emerged during this process, while the other ten remained with some changes in the descriptions.

While looking at the themes, several tensions arose. These describe opposing viewpoints or contradictory ideas. These tensions were kept in the data, and are discussed in further detail in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

This chapter addresses the overall research question presented earlier: How do teachers experience a blended, sustained, teacher-driven, grounded in practice and collaborative professional development opportunity? More specifically, the sub questions asked: What types of interactions do teachers engage in? What value do teachers feel they experienced and what challenges emerged from the LFPD?

The themes that emerged were as follows:

Table 5.1: Emergent Themes	
Theme 1	LFPD fulfils a specific need for the Late French teachers, who previously lacked opportunities to discuss, share and collaborate.
Theme 2	Teachers value practical professional development.
Theme 3	Teachers feel the benefits of sharing face-to-face and will allocate time for it.
Theme 4	Using the website is low on the priority list when it comes to allocating time to tasks.
Theme 5	Discussions of commonalities between schools and programs build connections between the LPFD participants.
Theme 6	Lesson plan sharing and discussions about classroom practice can result in changes in teacher practice.
Theme 7	Teachers are reassured when checking in to see if they are on the right track
Theme 8	Ongoing professional development requires teacher motivation.
Theme 9	Even in the face of technological issues, teachers continue to advocate its use.
Theme 10	There is a tension between using the online component solely as a lesson database and combining the database with a forum.
Theme 11	Scheduling face-to-face meetings, with a projected agenda, is important to productivity.
Theme 12	Ongoing professional development needs to be in sync with the school year.

The LFPD Experience

To start, was the LFPD blended, sustained, teacher-driven, grounded in practice and collaborative? Each of these components of the LFPD are examined in this chapter.

A Blended Experience?

The target model was a blend of face-to-face meetings and online interactions, although the reality differed from this. The teachers did not use the online spaces on a regular basis.

All five teachers logged in and experimented with the Moodle site, but their participation was varied. Diana and Alice both mentioned their discomfort with the online space in their participant logs and in the interviews. They responded to forum posts, but opted not to post questions or topics themselves. Diana explained that she was the type of person who typically feels unsure about sharing in new situations, both face-to-face and online. Alice explained that she saw herself as a person who is not technologically inclined. Barb was not an active forum contributor, but did post a document using the file sharing function. Dean and Carol posted both topics and responses to the forums, and also added to the wikis, an area of the Moodle site that multiple people can add to and alter. Dean also posted three documents using the file sharing function. Action on the Moodle site occurred immediately after face-to-face meetings, and tapered off soon after.

The teachers mentioned that they were frustrated with two aspects of the Moodle site: access and ease of use. To protect its teachers and students from inappropriate web content, the school district network automatically blocked all forms of forums, thus rendering it impossible for teachers to access that function, of any website, while at work. If teachers wanted to communicate with other teachers, they had to do it at home or using the wiki function. This posed problems, which Barb summed up in a participant log by writing, "We can't access all of the site at school (forum...) which is frustrating, as I tend to work on most things at school." This access issue made it difficult for all teachers to incorporate the online site into a regular routine. Many useful documents were saved to teachers' work computers. Moreover, their questions and issues arose at work, not at home. The wiki function was an alternative, but was a less intuitive function. Updating the wiki, and accessing information from it, took more time and effort. It was also difficult to know when a wiki was updated, so new content often went by unnoticed by others.

Several teachers, particularly those uncomfortable with new technologies, commented on the difficulties they had in navigating the site, making it frustrating for them to use. Stemming from this was decreased usage of the Moodle site. With decreased use, teachers became even less likely to use the website. As two teachers mentioned, little things like forgetting the web address or a login name impeded upon their usage of the website. In retrospect, the initial orientation session to Moodle was not long enough for more timid technology-users to familiarize themselves with the system.

With fewer people participating online, there was less motivation for the other members to contribute. Without feedback from others about what they had looked at, seen, tried or wanted to find, it was difficult for teachers to judge how useful their postings were. Dean explained this, saying,

> *If there are requests made online, I'm happy to search my files and try to send something over or type up an idea. If nobody is asking for anything, I don't know what to randomly send out… [After sending some documents], I'd hear a "Thanks," or something, but I didn't know if it was useful. There was never any conversation and I didn't know whether it was worth sending anything new.*

The teachers gave the Moodle site some time, but at a face-to-face meeting, the teachers decided to switch to a simpler and more familiar online tool: a blog. The teachers decided that a blog would be an easier way of keeping in touch than the Moodle site. Initially, Moodle was selected in part because of its ability to password protect entry into the website. This was an issue for LFPD participants because it meant that they had to log in to see if there were any changes or additions to the site. At the meeting, the LFPD participants expressed that there was no need for privacy for the way in which the online portion would be used, so the switch to a blog was logical. LFPD participants bookmarked the blog or made it their homepage. Since they did not have to log in to see changes, the blog made it much quicker to see if there were updates to the site made by another participant.

Even with these changes, though, the online component was not very active. There were a total of 15 posts. I posted 13 of these, while only two were participant posts. There were nine participant comments made in response to these posts. These were typically made in response to a post concerning the events of an upcoming face-to-face meeting. In saying that, it should be noted that LFPD participants were all checking the blog, as they all commented on at least one post. During his interview, Dean stated,

> *[The online component] hasn't caught fire with us yet, but it's there and we all know we can use it and ask for things. I check it every time I turn on the computer, so I think that's been very useful.*

Considering these occasional uses of the online components, was the LFPD still blended? Following a basic definition that a blended model includes some element of both face-to-face and online components, I would claim that the LFPD was blended. The online component wasn't an integral part of their communications, but it was still there for when they did want to use it. In fact, the majority of the LFPD participants said that they would recommend having an online space for discussion for teachers seeking to do professional development together, even if they themselves did not feel that they used the online space to their best advantage. Even if the online section played a small role in the experience, it was still a component of it. For example, the blog remains online, even after the study was completed, by request of the participants. They felt that the blog still had potential for future use.

As the participants claimed that they would recommend the online component to other teachers, it is possible that the lack of use of the online component is due to the difficulties that the teachers faced with the Moodle site. Thus it is not possible to know if the lack of use of the online pieces is simply a result of a problematic technology or reflective of larger challenges in using technology to support teacher professional development. Did their initial experiences minimize their later use of the online space? If the district servers unblocked forums, would the participants have more readily interacted online? These questions are important questions for future study.

A Sustained LFPD

The intent of the LFPD was to sustain it over time, for the nurturing of a CoP as well as for reasons of trustworthiness. Initially, the LFPD participants were to meet for four sessions, spread out over the course of several months. The group of teachers suggested, however, that there be more sessions, resulting in a total of five meetings. Some of these meetings took place after school, while others were longer and took place during professional days. All five teachers were present for every meeting.

When interviewing the LFPD participants, they all indicated interest in continuing the LFPD. Two of the LFPD teachers would be going on maternity leave, and would therefore be unlikely to continue in the following year, but they explained that they would take part in the LFPD if it continued upon their return to work. Barb explained,

Yes [this is something I would like to continue]. Next year I won't

be here, but I think that with late French immersion teachers, anyways,

without something that is put in place like this, I think that we should at

least try to contact each other and talk. I know that when I started, you

helped me out a lot and now, I'd like to be able to give some things back.

If other teachers are coming in, I think that it's definitely good.

Carol stated in her interview,

Absolutely, I hope we do [continue meeting]. I do. Depending on

who the teachers are, and if they're willing to do it. I'd definitely

encourage the person who's in for Barb to come. It'd be valuable for them

and good for us. I think she's going to have a lot of new ideas, fresh stuff

that is coming out.

There were several suggestions about how meetings could be run in the

future. Some suggested meeting only during school hours through the use of

professional growth and professional development days, while others valued

connecting after school too. Most felt that meeting every six weeks was

worthwhile, although many mentioned synchronizing the meetings to match the

ebb and flow of the school year. This emerged as Theme 12, Ongoing

professional development needs to be in synch with the school year. During her

interview, Barb stated,

[An ideal time would be] partway through first term where you've

got your first term things going but now you're looking [for ideas]. You

have a little bit of time, downtime, to think about the rest of the year. I

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think that that would be a good time to have [the LFPD] up and going and

maybe some meeting times there as well.

Both Dean and Diana echoed this sentiment during their interviews. Dean explained,

> *In the fall I'm looking for a lot of new ideas. By February, March,*
> *I'm starting to panic about getting through the things I know I have to do.*
> *Hopefully, in the fall, things will pick up now that we've gotten things*
> *established, because this year, it took a few months to get things going*
> *and I stopped looking for new things.*

Diana stated,

> *I think that having a meeting right at the beginning, right at the get-*
> *go, so that everyone can kind of share and be in the know. It's a lot [to*
> *meet] every month, but every six weeks or something. It seemed like we*
> *had some good times scheduled in the fall and then the pro-d day, and*
> *then in the spring, everybody got so busy it was kind of hard to connect*
> *that way.*

As these teachers explained, they have a preference for starting meetings fairly early on in the school year, to get everyone back into the mode of sharing and discussing, and tapering the meetings off so that they ended in April or May, when teachers have shifted their focus to the end of the school year. Both Barb and Dean mentioned the fact that August might be one of the most profitable times to meet, as it's more likely that material shared at that point would be

incorporated into lessons, although they also admitted the low likelihood of it happening.

The LFPD was sustained over the course of the school year, and there is an interest in continuing on with meetings. The teachers contacted each other online in between face-to-face sessions, to give feedback or to prepare for the next meeting. They were able to apply concepts discussed and continue discussions or work along the same lines. The sustained contact between teachers extended the professional development further.

Teachers as Agents of Change, Driving the LFPD

One of the goals of the LFPD was to move away from teachers being trained and towards teachers being the agents of change (Guskey, 1986). This means that teachers are actively pursuing knowledge in their quest to improve their own practice. The LFPD was set up so that teachers could take advantage of the structure of the LFPD to work on elements that they felt were important. This ended up being the case, where the grade six teachers and the grade seven teachers ended up working in different ways. At the initial face-to-face meeting, the teachers decided that they would initially meet with all teachers, and the separate into grade groups at every session. With the grade six teachers, the focus was on sharing and developing their science curriculum. In preparation for an upcoming meeting, teachers would choose a particular unit of science to focus on. They would then come to the meeting and share their ideas, lessons and strategies. The grade seven teachers decided to focus on their language arts program. One teacher brought two resources that he wanted to use more

effectively in his classroom. Stemming from this, the grade seven teachers picked sections of the resources and created lessons with them. The teachers were open to the others' wants and needs, and allocated time accordingly, making the LFPD teacher driven.

The way in which meetings ran was not the only example of teachers as agents of change. After interviewing teachers, it because apparent that the majority of the teachers decided to participate in the LFPD in part due to their desire to improve their own teaching program. Dean explained,

> *After three years of teaching the same thing, I probably got a little bit hermetic. As the next couple of years went by, I realized that I've got a lot more work to do in different areas. Where I am right now, I realize that I really want to improve most of the subjects and I'm actively seeking advice.*

Alice expressed her desire for continued learning,

> *I think you can get stagnant and I never want to be one of those stagnant teachers. I think we're in a profession where things change on a monthly basis… Things are so different and always changing and evolving, I would want to see what other people are doing, what best practices are.*

This desire to continue learning and evolving as teachers manifests itself in the way teachers chose to use their time with the LFPD, again highlighting that the LFPD was teacher driven.

Keeping the LFPD Grounded in Practice

Ensuring that the material covered during professional development opportunities is relevant and transferable to a teacher's practice is an important element of good professional development. An intention of the LFPD was to ensure that this was true to the experience. As the LFPD participants were all teachers of the same program, this was easier to ensure. During the interviews, the teachers were asked if they collaborated with English teachers of the same grade. Diana responded, saying,

> *Well, we do get together as grade 6 teachers and talk about different things and units and maybe coordinate field trips and that kind of thing. Because our resources are different, I find it frustrating if they have this fantastic "Everything you need to teach this", all there ready to go and I can't really use it. It's good to know what they're doing in terms of planning and sharing scheduling for field trips, but it's kind of frustrating. I appreciated having a venue to talk to other people who are doing the same thing and have resources in French.*

Barb and Carol also responded to the same question in the affirmative. Barb described her experiences, saying,

I collaborate usually on socials. We sit down and plan things together. When we sit down, we actually plan out the entire unit together. We obviously won't make the same worksheets, but sometimes we'll make the same test. We'll just write it together and we'll translate – well, I'll translate. I think that it's different for me, because of the ease at which you can collaborate with someone in your school. We share the same NIS time, so we just get together during that time… But I think that, in terms of language arts things, there's really nothing to compare to doing it with people who teach late French immersion.

Carol said,

Yeah, definitely during some school Pro-D days or staff meetings, I do have an opportunity to meet up with grade groups in the school and that is helpful because there are more issues based within the school. Not issues, but practical activities and ideas that are school based versus when we get together with the French immersion. It's also grade based but it's also program based. I like the variety of both, but I think for my teaching practice, the LFPD is more valuable than meeting with the other grade 6 teachers here.

The statements that these teachers made reflect both the value of collaborating with other teachers at the same school and their frustrations the isolating nature of the LF program. Collaborating with English same-grade teachers can be effective for content areas such as science or social studies, but it means that the LF teacher has to translate all the content. Sometimes

collaboration is not possible, like with French language arts. Working with early French teachers is more relevant than working with English teachers, but this too is not always possible. The late French students do not develop the level of French they need to use grade-specific content until later on in the program. Discussing and developing materials with other LF teachers made the experience more meaningful to the LFPD participants. As both Barb and Carol expressed in the previous quotes, the LFPD addressed a specific need for the teachers of the program.

The most relevant and the most transferable content arose when teachers worked in their grade groups, as there is a huge gap between the two grades. Dean described it thus,

> *[Asking other teachers for advice about developing lessons] was really tough actually, because so much of the issue is about the language that even my grade 6 French colleague wouldn't quite know where the students would be stuck in February.*

He went on to say, "It really helped to have a couple of people to bounce ideas off of that had exactly the same experience." A statement that Barb, another grade seven teacher, made during her interview echoes this idea, "I definitely liked breaking into grade groups, especially since we're late French immersion. It's so different. There's not much that you can really plan together with the sixes." The nature of the LFPD made it target specific. That is to say, the specific needs of the teachers were being met because they were meeting

with teachers of the same experience, keeping the professional development grounded in their practice.

Despite this, there was an element to the LFPD that made it difficult to transfer content from professional development to the classroom. This element was timing. There were times when teachers felt like they couldn't use the ideas that were being shared because they already had other lessons in motion. This leads back to the aforementioned suggestion by teachers that the LFPD start in August, so that lessons are more readily transferred to the different classrooms.

Collaboration

Roschelle (1992) studied collaboration and the concept of convergence. That is to say, that an essential component of collaboration is convergence, where two or more people develop shared meanings.

In the LFPD, teachers used their time together for three main purposes: discussion, sharing and joint planning. During the discussion and sharing components, teachers negotiated meaning about the practice of teaching within the LFI program, developing a shared repertoire consisting of shared understandings of words and unit plans.

The joint planning occurred in two different ways, depending on the grade group. The grade six teachers brought in their units and shared what they did. Through this discussion, the teachers were able to develop, alter or add to their units. The grade seven teachers planned language arts units using a common resource. This joint planning could be viewed as collaboration, as the teachers

were working towards a cohesive larger unit. On the other hand, the teachers each picked one text to work with individually, meaning the larger unit consisted of three separate lessons planned by the teachers. The building of shared meaning on these came through in questioning. A teacher would look up from her lesson and ask for advice or feedback. For example, during the planning session, Barb shared a question she was asking the students to answer, and asked if her question was too broad for the students. Another example would be Dean presenting his ideas for a line of questioning, and discussing the order in which the questions were presented with the other teachers.

Was the LFPD collaborative? The teachers did collaborate to build a shared understanding of certain components of their practice, which is in line with Roschelle's ideas (1992). During the focus group, the teachers stated that they wanted to be able to collaborate on lessons. This form of collaboration is not the convergence of understandings, but rather, the joint development of specific, tangible lessons. The forms that this joint planning took stemmed from the teaching and planning styles of the teachers participating. During their interviews, several teachers alluded to the fact that their lessons were not always these "beautiful units that are planned". Many of them are "scraps of paper ideas and some worksheets and things that come together in the end." One teacher, Alice, explained in her interview that, "I let things unfold organically… I would be far less successful if I wrote out a unit plan and did it lesson by lesson, because I would always be modifying and changing it and it would never follow the suit of what I do." Joint planning on specific lessons would not then suit the style of

many of these teachers. The more useful collaboration lies in the conception of units, where the "big idea" is planned out and agreed upon by the different teachers, but the actual step-by-step execution is left up to the individual teacher and their style of teaching.

The LFPD, a developing CoP?

A social theory of learning, Communities of Practice, was an important foundation on which this study was centered. The LFPD was meant to be the start of a potential young CoP, seeing as the teachers did not have much contact with each other prior to its inception.

Three dimensions of a CoP are mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire (Wenger, 2008). The LFPD had mutual engagement. More than a group of all teachers, the LFPD consisted of LFPD participants who all teach the same program. The teachers all had goals of improving their teaching practice as well.

There was joint enterprise, both with the entire group of LFPD participants together and with the smaller grade groups. At the beginning of the meetings, the teachers would discuss topics such as common issues and pitfalls of the program, such as students leaving French once they have completed their two years, or current events, such as how a particular school celebrates certain cultural events. The teachers valued these discussions, even if it was not "productive", in the sense that teachers were not emerging from this portion of the session with tangible lessons and practical ideas. Rather, the teachers viewed the discussion component as a time to "understand where each other is

coming from". They were negotiating an understanding of their practice, as a community. In smaller grade groups, the teachers continued to negotiate an understanding of their grade program with the other teachers as they discussed, shared and planned together.

In the process of negotiating an understanding of their practice, the teachers developed a shared repertoire. Different words and objects took on a shared meaning by the LFPD participants. An example of this would be the word, "resource". After various discussions amongst LFPD participants, the word takes on more than it's dictionary definition. It has context in the group. It refers to the teachers knowing what type of resources each school has, and the ways the teachers at those schools organize their resources to best help their students.

In addition to the three dimensions of a CoP, there are three identifiers: domain, community and practice. The teachers certainly share the domain of teaching within the LF program. There is also a community present. All teachers indicated that they were comfortable sharing with the other teachers in the LFPD. Some were very comfortable right away, whereas some other teachers developed increased comfort as they worked with the other teachers. More than this, during their interviews, several teachers pointed out that their comfort and engagement in the LFPD was due in part to this comfort with the other members. Carol explained, "I feel like there was a bond right away and I didn't feel the need to hold back." Barb stated that "I really enjoyed getting together with the other

teachers in it, and I think that if that wasn't the case, that I probably wouldn't be as on board."

The LFPD certainly allowed the teachers to practice together, through discussion and joint planning. Furthermore, the LFPD was not focused on achieving a particular goal or creating a particular lesson. The teachers were given the LFPD framework that grew out of a previously expressed need to meet and collaborate. The teachers were there out of an innate desire to add to their practice and their program. This became more evident when the teachers expressed a desire to continue meeting after the completion of the study.

Looking at the various dimensions and identifiers of a CoP, the LFPD shows elements of a CoP. Whether it continues to develop into a mature CoP depends on how long the teachers remain interested in maintaining the LFPD. The teachers have already started contemplating changes that would improve the quality of meetings, such as the timing of meetings and the creation of more specific agendas to keep the meetings productive and on task. Incorporating these into meetings that the teachers value is a good way to continue developing a CoP.

Addressing the Research Questions

During the data analysis, several themes emerged from the data. The themes were organized as follows to address the research questions:

Table 5.2: Themes Organized by Research Question	
Research Question	**Theme(s)**
What types of interactions did teachers engage in as part of the LFPD?	Theme 1: LFPD fulfils a specific need for the Late French teachers, who previously lacked opportunities to discuss, share and collaborate. Theme 2: Teachers value practical professional development. Theme 3: Teachers feel the benefits of sharing face-to-face and will allocate time for it. Theme 4: Using the website is low on the priority list when it comes to allocating time to tasks.
What value do teachers feel they experience from the LFPD?	Theme 1: LFPD fulfils a specific need for the Late French teachers, who previously lacked opportunities to discuss, share and collaborate. Theme 5: Discussions of commonalities between schools and programs build connections between the LPFD participants. Theme 6: Lesson plan sharing and discussions about classroom practice can result in changes in teacher practice. Theme 7: Teachers are reassured when checking in to see if they are on the right track
What challenges emerged from the LFPD?	Theme 4: Using the website is low on the priority list when it comes to allocating time to tasks. Theme 8: Ongoing professional development requires teacher motivation.

Other	Theme 9: Even in the face of technological issues, teachers continue to advocate its use.
	Theme 10: There is a tension between using the online component solely as a lesson database and combining the database with a forum.
	Theme 11: Scheduling face-to-face meetings, with a projected agenda, is important to productivity.
	Theme 12: Ongoing professional development needs to be in synch with the school year

Research Sub Question 1

Research sub question one focuses in on the types of interactions that the teachers engaged in as part of the LFPD. The question was as follows:

What types of interactions did teachers engage in as part of the LFPD?
  a. How did interactions change or evolve for both the online and face-to-face LFPD?
  b. How did the online and face-to-face LFPD influence interactions with other LFPD members?
  c. What did teachers view as productive or unproductive interactions for both the online and face-to-face LFPD?
  d. How did teachers engage with the tools provided to them with the online LFPD?

Changes in interactions. The research questions "How did interactions change or evolve for both the online and face-to-face LFPD?" and "How did the online and face-to-face LFPD influence interactions with other LFPD members?" were both encompassed by Theme 1: The LFPD fulfils a specific need for the Late French teachers, who previously lacked opportunities to discuss, share and collaborate. The LFPD provided teachers with a venue through which they could

communicate with the other LFPD teachers. Prior to the LFPD, teachers at the different schools rarely contacted each other. During her interview, Carol mentioned that she and Diana started teaching the program at the same time as grade six LF teachers, and tried to help each other out. She then added, "But the physical distance of her being so far south and me being so far north, we didn't talk as much." In his interview, Dean revealed that his experience mirrored that of Carol's, saying,

> *You [the researcher] and I talked on our own for a while, and I had passed on some things to Barb before… but it was really difficult to network and to just have those experiences provided by the district or by somebody else.*

Having the LFPD ensured that the teachers had regular contact with each other. The work "connect" was a popular one during interviews. Several teachers mentioned that the LFPD allowed them to connect with teachers they previously hadn't had much opportunity to connect with. Dean summed it in his interview up by saying,

> *I'm thinking about my five other colleagues in the program a lot more than I had been for a while. It was kind of "Out of sight, out of mind", whereas now, everybody is more in my mind and I'm thinking about the other schools more.*

Most teachers felt that their interactions in the program did not change or evolve, although Diana explained in her interview that she was not completely comfortable sharing and discussing at the outset, which she explained was

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typical of her personality. She then shared that her comfort level with sharing increased as she got to know her fellow teachers better.

Productive Interactions. The research question, "What did teachers view as productive or unproductive interactions for both the online and face-to-face LFPD?" was addressed by Theme 2: Teachers value practical professional development, and Theme 3: Teachers feel the benefits of sharing face-to-face and will allocate time for it.

During the focus group and initial participant logs, the teachers highlighted the importance of practical professional development. They expressed the desire to learn something new and transferable to the classroom. During their interviews, the teachers explained that the most productive component of the LFPD was the face-to-face discussions, specifically in grade groups. Barb explained,

> *I think the most productive was when we got together with a goal, and brought material and shared that material: lesson ideas or unit ideas. I found that very helpful. Not even the individual lesson plans, just the "This is what I'm doing in this subject." I thought it was very helpful to get the creative juices flowing."*

The sharing time that the entire group of teachers had prior to the grade grouped sessions were seen as less productive, but still important to the teachers. Three teachers mentioned that these whole group sessions were important to keeping the teachers connected and giving everybody a chance to

catch up. However, they also suggested that this time be scheduled into an agenda in the future. During her interview, Barb expressed it thus,

I would recommend for those meetings people putting forth ideas beforehand about what they want to talk about because I definitely found the times where we said, "Okay, we want to do this," we were efficient at getting things going. As the year progressed and people weren't thinking of planning as much, it was still nice to catch up, truthfully, but in terms of professional growth, it's not as efficient.

In this way, time is allocated to this bonding time, but members don't lose focus and lose planning time.

While one teacher described the online component of the LFPD as unproductive to her, the other teachers did not make mention of elements that they felt were unproductive during their interviews.

Online tools. The research question, "How did teachers engage with the tools provided to them with the online LFPD?" is addressed by Theme 4: Using the website is low on the priority list when it comes to allocating time to tasks. As previously mentioned, only one teacher mentioned that the website was unproductive to her. Another teacher was at the other end of the spectrum, having used the online site more than the other teachers. The other three teachers mentioned that they did not make time to use the site as well as they could have, but still said that they would recommend it as an element of professional development. For example, Alice wrote in one of her participant logs, "I have been unproductive on the website, although I would definitely not

blame the website itself. It's just me being really busy and not making the time to do it." In her participant log, Barb wrote,

> *In truth, I have not been using the LFPD website very often. I don't think it is because I don't find it useful, I think it's just that I get into a bad habit of dealing only with what is directly in front of me when things are really busy at school.*

Both of these quotes highlight the fact that teachers are busy people. Although the teachers acknowledge the potential benefits of regularly using an online site, and would even recommend it to other teachers, the reality is that the teachers had other priorities that they focused on.

When the online tools were used, they were used to share documents with other teachers and to discuss topics for an upcoming meeting. There were some initial attempts at discussing more pedagogical components of teaching, such as how to structure a French language arts program, but the online tool just wasn't conducive to discussing in-depth topics such as these. Dean explained, "[Discussing online] takes a lot more effort. You have to go back to it many times over probably a couple of weeks and I think it would be more productive just to sit together and get something done."

Research Sub Question 2

The second research sub question focused on what the teachers valued from their LFPD experience. The question was as follows:

What value do teachers feel they experience from the LFPD…

a. socially?
b. practically?
c. theoretically?

Social Values. Theme 1, stating that the LFPD fulfils a specific need for the Late French teachers, who previously lacked opportunities to discuss, share and collaborate ties in to the social aspect. Several teachers mentioned in their interviews that the LFPD provided them with the opportunity to do something they weren't able to do before on a regular basis: connect. Barb said, "It was a good way to connect with other teachers… You're so busy, you don't often get a chance to do that," while Dean said, "It's been a good feeling to be connected to colleagues teaching the same thing and with the same kind of issues." Diana explained,

> *I think it was important for us all to connect as a team. I know that when it was my first year of doing French Immersion, they had this Late French immersion meeting. It was really neat, but that's the only thing late French immersion related where it was focused and really useful, so to have this where there was a venue and someone was organizing it, it was really valuable.*

In her interview, Carol highlighted the fact that the LFPD giving teachers a chance to connect helped pull these teachers out of an isolating situation,

> *We've been a small, modest sized community of late French immersion. I wonder what it would be like in another district. Would you be very isolated in this position, or is there a similar kind of community in other districts? I think it's been very beneficial…*

More than having the chance to meet with other teachers, removing them from the isolation that comes from being in a unique program, the teachers valued the connections that they made with the other LFPD teachers. This ties in with Theme 5: Discussions of commonalities between schools and programs build connections between the LPFD participants.

During her interview, Diana shared her feelings about the LFPD providing her opportunities to talk with other LFPD participants, allowing her to get to know them better:

> *It was good to make connections when we were meeting, to learn more about each other, and to have more of a kind of balance between knowing who you are as a colleague and knowing who you are as a person.*

In her interview, Carol described the LFPD as being more than time to share and learn. Getting to know the other teachers to her was, "Helpful emotionally; understanding, sympathizing with each other and understanding what we're going through… Friends! Friendships! That's been helpful to go through that together."

Practical Values. At the outset, the teachers expressed a desire for practical professional development, as with Theme 2: Teachers value practical professional development. They felt that professional development, as a whole, should be relevant to their practice and easily transferable to their practice. Before starting the LFPD, teachers explained that they hoped to plan units together and share lesson plans – all practical elements of professional

development. In fact, many teachers expressed that an element of the LFPD that they would recommend to other teachers trying to work as a group on professional development would be the joint planning sessions. These sessions were even more helpful when the teachers got together with the goal of discussing or planning a particular unit. The grade six teachers found that focusing on their science units as a group was practical and applicable to their own classrooms. The grade seven teachers ended up being able to share and use units for social studies and language arts. In her interview, Carol described it as,

> *Sharing lesson plans, sharing unit plans. Sharing, especially with the sixes. [Asking], "Hey, have you done this yet? How did you do it? Have you learned this verb tense yet?" Just sharing that kind of stuff was the most beneficial, the most productive.*

In her participant log, Alice wrote,

> *The LFPD has enriched many aspects of my teaching; it has helped me with new ideas, lesson plans that I have been able to use in my own classroom and being able to receive feedback on what I have been doing; reassurance that I am not totally out in left field on this new adventure!*

Interestingly enough, the teachers spend less time talking about the immediate impact of the LFPD and more time talking about the long-term value of it. After participating in the LFPD for a few months, teachers started to express that the value of the LFPD went beyond benefits that are immediately

practical. The teachers found that they were thinking about new strategies, lessons and even ways of organizing material, tying in Theme 6: Lesson plan sharing and discussions about classroom practice can result in changes in teacher practice.

Dean described the longer term effects of the LFPD on his practice in this participant logs, saying,

> *I am trying to seize the day and implement new ideas quickly when I can, but also take a long-term approach to changing my practice. Some of the ideas shared by LFPD colleagues are real systemic changes that I need to think about a lot more.*

Barb expressed the same ideas in her participant log,

> *I have changed the way I think about my language arts program. While I have used some direct ideas from the website, I have found that the conversations have allowed me to think about my entire programming, deciding what I'm happy with and what I can improve upon.*

In their participant logs, Barb also stated that she changed the way she assesses students and Carol said, "I feel like others are doing exciting and different things in the classroom, and this encourages me to keep expanding my ideas and challenging my teaching, in a good way!"

While the changes that these teachers are referring to are not immediately applicable to the classroom, they are practical in the sense that they have an

impact on what happens in the classroom. The LFPD affected both short-term and long-term teaching practice. As Dean said in his interview,

> *The two kinds of professional development that I find most useful are general teaching philosophy discussions or presentations and joint planning sessions, whether it's for activities or events or for instruction, instructional materials. We did a little bit of both.*

Theoretical Values. The practical, long-term changes that the teachers mentioned stemmed from the discussions about classrooms and programming, which led teachers to reflect on their practice.   Diana explained in her interview, "You're critically assessing how you're doing things, what you're doing and wondering how another person would do it." In her interview, Barb mirrored this statement, saying, "It definitely made me think about my teaching. Just explaining my units and ideas to another teacher automatically makes you think about your teaching, which is good."

At the same time, the goal of the LFPD discussion was never to change the way people are teaching. In fact, Carol expressed her relief at this, saying,

> *From our meetings, I go away thinking, "Yeah, I'm doing the right thing. I'm happy. This is going well. I could do more of this…" but I don't like that feeling when you leave a workshop and think, "Oh man. I'm not this right, I'm not doing that right". It doesn't feel good and then it just gets discombobulated. I like that feeling of saying, "Okay, I'm on the right track. I'm doing well. Everybody else seems to be doing the same thing. I find comfort in that."*

Theme 7, Teachers are reassured when checking in to see if they are on the right track, was a commonly expressed thought for the teachers. Discovering that they were on the right track was of benefit both theoretically and emotionally. It helped theoretically, as teachers could be reassured that their teaching practices were on par and not in need of a massive overhaul. It also helps emotionally. Teaching can be very personal, and it is comforting to know that nothing is wrong with the way each individual leads his or her classroom. This theme came up in participant logs and in interviews. In her participant log, Alice wrote. "Chatting and sharing has helped me with the practical aspects of my first year as an LFI teacher.... resources, trouble-shooting and keeping me on the right track." In her own log, Carol wrote,

> I find the meetings to be useful because when we discuss things, I feel like everyone has experience in our particular situation and it's helpful to empathize together. It's nice to check in with others in terms of instruction, strategies, ideas for curriculum, etcetera. I feel like I'm on the right track."

Diana expressed the following in her interview:

> I think that face-to-face, being able to discuss some units and just sharing ideas, kind of the plights of the program and getting some feedback and some commiseration really helped. The "This is normal and this is a struggle" and having people to relate on that. And knowing that this is a group of people in the program, so you're not going to a random French immersion workshop where people teach other subjects and stuff

and it's not like they can relate. So then, when I went back to the

classroom, I felt like I was on the right track, or "Great, now I have this

new idea!"

This may be specific to the LF program, as the only way teachers can

compare their students' progress is by comparing with another LF teacher, due to

the program's unique pace. Teachers could see that the advances they were

making and the snags they were hitting were not unique to their classroom alone.

Research Sub Question 3

The third research sub question focused on the challenges teachers faced

as part of their LFPD experience. The question was as follows:

What challenges emerged from the LFPD…
   a. socially?
   b. practically?
   c. theoretically?

Social Challenges. When asked if the LFPD had any negative impact on

their social lives, the LFPD participants tended to deemphasize the amount of

time spent participating. No themes emerged specifically focusing on the LFPD's

social challenges. Alice responded, saying, "You mean the three hours, the four

hours of it? No." Alice was referring to the hours outside of school hours during

which the LFPD met, not including the time spent during professional days or

professional growth days spread over 5 sessions. Barb responded by saying,

"No. Truthfully, if I go home right after school, chances are I'm doing nothing

anyways, so I may as well do something worthwhile." In Dean and Diana's case,

the social challenges put on them were minimized due to the group's openness to meeting at their school. Dean explained this in his interview,

No, people were very accommodating, coming to our school instead of Diana and I having to go somewhere else. Otherwise, I'm sure it would have, since we don't have access to cars so easily, and with children at home it becomes a little trickier to change up the routines. But because people were so accommodating, no, it did not.

When considering the emphasis that teachers put on the importance of their time, but the lack of emphasis on the time it took to participate in the LFPD, it seems that the time spent was outweighed by the benefits they experienced from their participation. This is highlighted by two comments Alice made during her interview, first saying, "My time is really valuable as a teacher and, of course, I like to have my spare time too, but in a professional setting, I want to make sure that it's 100% worth my time," and later saying, "I felt like [the face-to-face meetings] was valuable time. We didn't waste any time."

With respect to social dynamics within the group, amidst different grade levels and schools, there were no social challenges. A number of teachers made mention of their comfort with the other members. At the same time, both Carol and Barb made reference the importance of this, respectively saying, "Absolutely, I hope we do [continue]. Depending on who the teachers are, and if they're willing to [participate]," and "The teachers definitely have an impact. I really enjoyed getting together with the teachers in it, and I think that if that wasn't the case, that I probably wouldn't be as on board."

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Practical Challenges. Practically, the teachers encountered more

challenges. The online component was one of these challenges. Initially, their

difficulties seemed to be tied to the Moodle space. The forum was not accessible

at work, changes to the wiki were difficult to monitor and the teachers found

Moodle confusing to navigate. The activity online did not change, however, with

the change in online space to the blog, highlighting Theme 4: Using the website

is low on the priority list when it comes to allocating time to tasks. This

reluctance could be the result of technological comfort. Several of the teachers

mentioned their discomfort with new technology. The most active participant

online had substantially more technological experience, having completed a

diploma program in the field of technology.

During interviews, several teachers expressed a preference for

exchanging lesson plans in paper form. They find the paper form easier to

manipulate, copy and work through. Beyond that, the format in which teachers

plan their lessons was not conducive to online sharing. Oftentimes, lessons are

handwritten outlines with photocopies and handouts mixed in. They are not

typed out and ready to share online. In order to share the lesson, a teacher

would have to organize and type the lesson in a format that would make sense to

another teacher. Doing so would be pointless for the teacher creating her

lesson, as it would already be in a format that works for her. While the teachers

were happy to take the time to photocopy their plans or share their binders, with

explanation, it was not worthwhile for them to share the lessons online.

Moreover, the teachers were not willing to go through the effort of typing up a

lesson that might not be useful to someone else. As Dean was quoted saying earlier, "If there are requests made online, I'm happy to search my files and try to send something over or type up an idea. If nobody is asking for anything, I don't know what to randomly send out."   In order to push the use of technology in between meetings further, the technological components need to address specific needs, as opposed to just existing for general use. Moreover, teachers need to be motivated about it's use. Theme 8, Ongoing professional development requires teacher motivation, ties into this idea. Teachers need to be motivated to ask for advice or for resources, just as teachers need to be motivated to respond to these requests.

Another challenge with technology and the LFPD was access. Although this is out of the control of the teachers in the district, they were frustrated nonetheless at their lack of access to their computer accounts at schools that were not their own. This made it difficult to share any documents that were stored on a computer. As discussed earlier, the lack of access to forums impeded on teacher use of the online component of the LFPD.

Yet another challenge that teachers faced had to do with application of lessons and strategies that were discussed during the face-to-face sessions. Much of this was due to the timing of the sharing. The teachers felt that it was difficult at times to incorporate the new content if they were part way through a unit. Although the material could be used in the next school year, it is possible that the lack of immediate application could reduce the chances of the new material being applied. Again, though, teachers need to be motivated to apply

these ideas at a later point in the teaching year. If they were not interested or

motivated to do so, the materials and the ideas discussed would just fall to the

wayside.

A Lack of Theoretical Challenges. The teachers did not comment on

any other challenges are part of their experience with the LFPD.

Tensions

When looking at the data, there were some themes that did not directly

address the research questions asked. These themes are:

Theme 9: Even in the face of technological issues, teachers continue to advocate its use.

Theme 10: There is a tension between using the online component solely as a lesson database and combining the database with a forum.

Theme 11: Scheduling face-to-face meetings, with a projected agenda, is important to productivity.

Theme 12: Ongoing professional development needs to be in sync with the school year.

There were additional tensions that emerged from the themes. These

tensions were conflicting ideas or themes. They were kept in the data and are

reported on because they highlight the complexity of professional development

and teacher needs. These tensions are:

Tension between need for practicality versus long term changes in teacher practice

Tension between productivity and the development of a community

Tension between being productive and using time to discuss shared lessons

Tension between advocating the use of online resources, while not wanting to invest the time needed to use it

Tension between using the online component solely as a lesson database and combining the database with a forum

Scheduling Meetings

Theme 12, Ongoing professional development needs to be in sync with the school year, emerged as teachers talked about their views of how the LFPD should run in the future. The teachers discussed both the frequency of the meetings and when they might be more useful. Alice felt that meeting once a school term would be sufficient, while other teachers liked the regular meetings. Diana explained that she liked having regular meetings, especially with time set aside on the professional days. Dean also mentioned his preference for using professional days as meeting times, while Carol stated,

> *I liked the mix. It wasn't unrealistic, but I know for other people it might be if they're taking courses after school. It tends to pile up. For me, personally, it was a nice mix of after school and professional days.*

In addition to talking about the frequency of meetings, the teacher addressed the timing at which meetings should be held. Several teachers mentioned the fact that the beginning of the year is a good time for new ideas, whereas the end of the year is not. In her interview, Diana explained that, "I think that usually from May on, everyone hopefully knows what they're going to be doing for the next six weeks and meeting might not be as productive then." Barb made mention of this idea during her interview too, saying,

The later in the year meetings, just because of the time of year…

you're not thinking about planning. You tend to be on the rail tracks, just

letting things go, but I think that's just that time of year.

These quotes highlight the teachers need to have professional

development that takes into account the needs of the school year. There are

certain points at which teachers are more actively seeking new ideas and

change, and other points at which they are too overwhelmed to be able to apply

new lessons or ideas. It also means that the meetings should take into account

reporting periods, when teachers are focused on writing their report cards and

not to sharing materials with other teachers, and other stressful school events,

such as school plays, camps or large projects. This makes meetings difficult to

schedule, as each school has their own calendar. Sometimes the professional

days or reporting periods overlap, but this is not always the case.

On the other hand, the teachers experienced varied report card due dates

and differing professional days over the course of the study. Two of the teachers

were undergoing personal issues that made it difficult for them to participate as

fully as they wanted to. Even with these challenges, the meetings were all fully

attended by LFPD participants. All the teachers participated in sharing session

and took something they found useful away from the meetings.

It is evident that the teachers value meetings that are scheduled with the

flow of the school year in mind. However, once the meetings are scheduled,

teachers invested in their professional development will make an effort to attend

and to participate, even if the times turn out to be less than ideal.

Time

Several tensions involve the idea of using time productively. During the school day, teachers have a lot going on. In addition to teaching, there are lesson plans to create, student work to mark, parents to communicate with and meetings to go to. Time is precious to teachers. Understandably, the teachers in this study indicated regularly that they felt that professional development should be relevant and productive. In short, professional development should be worth their time. This is reflected in Theme 11, Scheduling face-to-face meetings, with a projected agenda, is important to productivity. During their interviews, the teachers all mentioned the importance of knowing what was to be discussed at a meeting in advance. As Carol explained,

> *I think [that it is important to have an agenda set out]. It doesn't have to be super specific, but I remember one time when we said, "How about Science or Socials, and more specifically, let's talk about government and electricity." It was easier for me. You don't want to have to pull all of the things out of your binder to bring them with you and have to go back to your binder to re-file them. I just grab the binder, bring it with me to the meeting.*

Along the same lines, Diana stated that an element that increased productivity in meetings was, "Having a particular unit to talk about and then we each bring something to share about that." Knowing what is to be discussed at a meeting and coming prepared is a way of increasing the productivity of professional development.

Carol, during her interview, emphasized the importance of having organization,

I would recommend that they have a leader or a teacher that is responsible, like you were, that organized. Teachers are so good at being organized, but they need somebody to lead them - a leader to instigate the meetings.

With the LFPD, the teachers scheduled the five meetings together, during their first meeting. It made it easier for everyone to have those dates, written in his or her calendar, in advance. The agenda for each meeting, however, was determined the week of the meeting. The creation was prompted by a post made by myself, asking LFPD participants what they felt like focusing on. As I initiated the LFPD for research, I usually took the leadership role in asking LFPD participants what they wanted to focus on. Other LFPD participants took the lead in selecting foci for the meetings. Whether this would be the case in future meetings is unclear, however, it is clear that the LFPD participants want organization of some form.

Interestingly enough, even though teachers feel that the focus should be on effectively using time, they ended up doing two things that were not immediately timesaving: building in catch up time to meetings and making long-term changes to their programs.

Catching Up. The teachers opted to use some of their meeting time for general catching up, resulting in a tension between productivity and the development of a community. While this catching up was professional, in that

the teachers were discussing their schools, their classrooms and material relevant to the program, it was not focused on problem solving. At times, it turned into a venting session, where the teachers expressed their frustration or confusion about things. For example, the teachers spent time talking about the difficulties of keeping students in French immersion. They exchanged anecdotes about communication with students and parents, compared the ratios of their students remaining in French immersion and leaving French immersion and despaired about teaching students who know they will not need the skills the teachers were trying to teach. None of this was immediately applicable to the classroom, but the teachers still felt that time dedicated to this was important.

A huge part of the value of this sharing session, they felt, was that it was important to connect with the other teachers and to get to know where the other teachers were coming from. As previously discussed, the LFPD participants felt that it was important to make connections with their colleagues. Another part of it was, as Barb described in her interview, natural: "I think sometimes the initial part was a catch-up time, a wind-down after school, get your mind on something else, wherever you were that day. I think it's just a human nature thing." Even though the time was not directly useful to their classrooms, the teachers felt that the time spent sharing helped them. Some even said that this time was therapeutic for them, because the LFPD participants could share with people who understood where they were coming from. Both Barb and Carol mention this in their participant log, respectively saying, "I found our last session therapeutic," and "I find the meetings to be useful because when we discuss things, I feel like

everyone has experience in our particular situation and it's helpful to empathize together."

This time, and this process, was important enough that the teachers factored it in when talking about creating agendas for meetings. During his interview, Dean said,

> *Because time is of the essence, getting down to business faster when we get together… if we're meeting for a full day, have a schedule of 9:00-9:30, catch-up and story sharing, and then 9:30-10:30, we're going to this particular thing… [Sharing time] is clearly important to the group.*

Longer-Term Changes. Teachers also spent time talking about longer-term changes that they would like to make in their programming, resulting in a tension between the need for practicality versus long-term changes in teacher practice. Much of their discussion was conceptual and actually resulted in teachers having more work – not less. Instead of just using lessons plans from their peers, they were spending time reflecting on how certain concepts could be best ordered in their curriculum. This tension arises because teachers have pressures on their time. They felt the need to have lessons they can use immediately, that do not take much advance planning to use. At the same time, the group of teachers in this study is one that is actively seeking improvements to their practice, as was previously discussed. Through their discussions about their plans and practices, the teachers then reflected upon their practice and the practice of their peers. They were able to see other ways of doing things. Because they were open to change, their own planning could be affected.

The discussions about lessons occurred not necessarily because teachers were seeking to change their practice, but because they felt that using time actually saved time in the long run. There was a tension between being productive and using time to discuss lessons. That is to say, the teachers felt that exchanging lesson plans without discussion would be less useful to them. With discussion, teachers could share information about how they taught the lesson, areas where students would get stuck, or interesting questions that would hook the students into lessons. These discussions gave the lessons context, thus increasing the likelihood that they are used. Diana explained in her interview that, "Discussing is helpful because I might get something different out of it, just leafing through, than [the other teachers] would." Carol stated in her interview, "I think that that's really important, to discuss it. To say, 'This works really well, so use it,' or, 'Do it this way.' I don't think it's as helpful just taking someone's lesson plan."

In her interview, Barb explained,

> *You'd brought packs of things that you had done and if I wasn't really paying attention when you talked about it, I'd come back to the school and look and think, "So what did you really do with this?" [It's like] a textbook. A textbook is nothing without some plan behind it.*

These discussions were also useful, as the lessons themselves were not always intuitive. As discussed before, lessons were not always packaged with objectives, materials needed and steps to take to teach the lesson. Rather, the physical information shared was handouts and photocopies. Objectives,

materials and step-by-step lessons were shared orally. As Alice explained in her interview,

> *What I would send would not be a step-by-step lesson. What I would send out would be my criteria sheet and give the performance standards. It would be that model and so the lesson, step-by-step, the person [using it] would have to fill out herself.*

Online Use and Time. Two tensions regarding online use emerged. First of all, there was a tension between advocating the use of online resources, while not wanting to invest the time needed to use it. During their interviews, some of the teachers talked about some of the benefits of online spaces. Diana said, "I think that for some people, the format of the online sharing could really work for them," and Barb said, "The idea of online, I think, is excellent. I was really bad for multiple reasons in fully using it to its advantage. I regret that I didn't use it better throughout the year." Dean explained, "I think it's good to have an online discussion and resource sharing site or tool. I think that was really useful." During their interviews, almost all the teachers recommended that other teachers hoping to form a group like the LFPD include an online site. These comments indicate that the teachers do see the potential of an online space. There was a disconnect between the teacher views of the online space and the frequency of which they used it.

Teacher comfort with technology is a factor. Alice described herself as, "not technologically inclined at all," during her interview. Diana also discussed her discomfort with technology during her interview, saying, "I'm not as online a

person as much as some people are, necessarily." During her interview, Barb explained that beyond comfort, the LFPD participants have to incorporate the use of the online space into their routines,

> *If you had people that were very technically aware and really familiar with the features of a certain blog, that might help. I know, for me sometimes, it was as stupid as forgetting the website and not remembering what I wrote down. Being in the office and [thinking], "Ugh, I don't want to go back to my class." Just laziness, it really comes down to, which is sad, but true.*

The lack of feedback from others ties into time issues as well. During her interview, Alice stated, "I think we're all a little bit behind with technology, and anything we did share, we didn't necessarily have attachment files of the stuff. It was hard copy." This highlights the aforementioned issue that the way in which teachers assemble lessons is not necessarily conducive to sharing online. Lesson plans and unit plans are not necessarily typed up in entirety. Teachers will pull from multiple sources when creating lessons. For example, a social studies lesson about Egypt may include several images coming from different books, or an activity photocopied from a teacher resource. The teacher may incorporate components of another teacher's lesson. These elements may be organized and described in a document, but this is not necessarily the case.

Even if a teacher had lessons in the format available for sharing online, it is not clear whether this would be helpful to the teachers receiving them. Diana described her need for hard copies during her interview, saying,

For me, I need something in front of me. To open up the attachment or the link just isn't as useful for me. And then I could cut and paste whatever someone had sent me and photocopy it as needed, and then it's right there, I can file it in the right spot.

Carol also found that hard copies of unit plans made it easier to sort through the content, saying in her interview,

I'm a visual person. I need to see it when we talk about it. I also found it really useful when Diana or Alice would send something through district mail. You get it and it's a little "Oh hey, I have a surprise. What's this? Oh, socials. I'll put it in [my files] and try it next year," or sort through it and take what I want.

These statements call attention to their need for hard copies. Even if these teachers were to find lessons online that they liked, they are likely to want to print out the documents. Once printed, the teachers may highlight, make notes or reorganize the information. For teachers who prefer hard copies, it can be easier to receive a pre-copied package than it is to download a document and print it out.

Online Use and Discussions. The second tension regarding online use was between using the online component solely as a lesson database and combining the database with a forum. Despite the LFPD participants' misgivings about formatting and time needed to participate online, many of them have used online lesson databases to search for lesson plan ideas or have expressed the desire to share lesson with other LFPD participants online. However, this would

involve more than LFPD participants having to post their lessons. This already was something that several of the LFPD participants felt was difficult for them to do in terms of time and format. During their interviews, LFPD participants expressed the desire to have a means of discussing the shared units, whether in face-to-face or online format. As previously discussed, the LFPD participants felt that discussion is a necessary component to understanding how a lesson might be used. Also, after discussion, a teacher might have a deeper understanding of the lesson and therefore might be able to better incorporate it into their style of teaching.

At the same time, this is a tension in that teachers may want to confer about documents that are shared in between meetings, meaning an online forum might be a venue for discussion. This ties into issues already mentioned, namely, the time it takes to discuss. The LFPD participants already indicated that it takes too much time to post lessons. Despite the fact that they would be happy to download lessons they find useful, it takes both time and effort to discuss the lessons. The process involves posting comments and reading replies. If there were too much time in between posts and replies, a teacher would have to review to post to remember the thread of the discussion. On the other hand, not including a place for discussion might mean that the teachers are less likely to share documents online, as the lessons are less meaningful.

Although the LFPD participants did not frequently use the online component, it is worthwhile maintaining. As previously mentioned, the LFPD participants do feel that there is potential in having an online site. Moreover, the

documents that teachers were able to share were more pertinent than documents created by teachers in English, or than those found on lesson databases. Carol described this in her interview,

> *I trust my colleagues more since I know they're doing exactly the IRPs that I need to cover. They're covering the same thing, they have the same situation and I think that when I'm on my own, looking for something. For example, today, I was looking for a little socials activity that has to do with trade and economy, you know, kind of thinking that I'll go to a database, I'll search this up. Whereas, if we had a meeting in the next couple of weeks, I could be like, "Hey, what do you guys do for this?" I guess, just working on my own, I'll see what I can find. I do sometimes use databases or just internet lesson plan searching, but it very useful to be able to say, "This IRP, what did you do? How did you do it? I'd love to know."*

In saying this, Carol emphasizes two benefits of the LFPD: trust and practicality. The quality of lessons found online can vary, with no real way of determining their quality. Furthermore, the lessons may come from all over Canada, or beyond. The curriculum used to structure the lessons may not match the curriculum being followed by the LFPD teachers. This brings the LFPD participants back to the issue of time, where it takes time to sort through piles of lessons to determine which lesson – or which part of a lesson – could be useful. It is easier to trust a teacher when you've conversed with them, seen their style and understand their approach.

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CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The goal of setting up the framework of the LFPD was to provide a group of teachers a means to work together. Based on literature about professional development needs, the LFPD was structured so that the experience was blended, sustained, teacher-driven, grounded in practice and collaborative. This section discusses how the findings from this study fit in with and add to the literature. It also looks at the limitations and implications for further research and practice.

Teachers and Time

The concept of time, or the lack of it, was mentioned frequently by the LF participants. It is curious that while the teachers all felt time pressures from their workload, they were all willing to dedicate time to meeting face-to-face (Theme 3).

VanDeWeghe and Varney's study (2006) of teachers who created a study group in order to improve their teaching may provide some insight into this. The teachers in VanDeWeghe & Varney study were a self-directed group who initiated these meetings. These teachers wanted to use their time in this way. Although the LFPD participants as a group did not initiate meetings, they had previously expressed a desire to meet. The collaboration that occurred was genuine, in that it stemmed from teachers who truly wanted to improve their practice. The LFPD participants' willingness to dedicate time to face-to-face

meetings could be due to this genuineness, a key factor according to

VanDeWeghe & Varney (2006).

Another contributor to their willingness to allocate time towards meeting

could be the results of meeting. As previously discussed, the participants took

away both tangible, immediately implementable materials as well as reflection on

longer term changes that could be made. As professional development has been

found to be of better use to teachers when it is relevant to the teachers (Barab et

al. 2001), the mix of both short term and long term applicability to the teachers'

practice could be an incentive to continue using time to meet. It is a step towards

participating in professional development that is both continuous and context

specific, which Schlager & Fusco (2004) describe as ideal for professional

development.

Why were the teachers so willing to invest time in face-to-face meetings,

and yet less willing to allocate time to the online component (Theme 4)? It could

be that there was a lack of genuineness in online participation. The focus online

was on a shorter-term exchange of units, rather than the deeper reflections that

could affect long term practice. It may also be that the online component did not

offer what the participants desired, which will be discussed next.

The Blended Format

In a situation where people wishing to collaborate are separated by

distance, the integration of technology to help maintain contact seems logical.

Several researchers found that with a blended model, teachers started

incorporating technology more often into their daily practice (Mouzakis, 2008) and engaged in continuous dialogue (Holmes et al., 2005). On the other hand, Schwen & Hara (2004) report technology was not well received in the four CoP case studies, even in situations where there was an established CoP. In several of these case studies, the technological component was created at some expense.

In this study, the blended format provided an interesting mix of frustration, disregard and hope for the LFPD participants. The LFPD participants expressed interest in the potential of technology to help them keep in touch with the other members of the group, both before and after participating in the LFPD. At the same time, the online component was rarely used. There could be multiple explanations for this.

One explanation could be the number of participants in the LFPD. With only six people participating, having three LFPD participants who are not comfortable with using the online space can greatly impact its use. This is especially true when the participants come from both grade groups, limiting the number of participants that are comfortable with sharing to one or two people per grade group. It reflects some of Dean's earlier comments from his interview, where he describes a disinterest in posting for the sake of posting. He explained that he was happy to post specific content that people request, but that he wasn't going to post random lessons without the request or feedback. This makes sense, as it can be a waste of time to add content that may not be useful to anyone else.

However, Schwen and Hara (2004) looked at four CoP case studies, in which there were varied numbers of participants. One of their cases examined a group of seven lawyers who formed a close, connected group. They too, like the LFPD participants, resisted the use of technology. At the same time, another group of lawyers described in the article also resisted the use of technology, but they were a much larger group with 65 lawyers and 30 legal assistants. Technology was just not useful for them. The number of participants using the technology, and their comfort with it, may not be the only contributors to its use.

One impediment and another possible explanation stems from the lack of feedback and immediacy in that people cannot know what kinds of posts will be well received by the other members of the group. In person, it is much easier to see what topics are of interest and what the needs are. There is less editing in person, and there are more social cues, such as facial expression, body language and tone of voice, that indicate how people feel about what is being presented. Online, it is difficult to know what leads to a lack of response. It could be that a person didn't see the post, didn't have time to respond, wasn't interested in responding, didn't understand or was offended by a post. There is a wide range of possibilities, especially if a person tends to feel self-conscious about their contributions online. This can be a problem in both large and small groups. With a large group, it is more likely that the members to do not know each other well, making it more difficult to judge what their reactions might be. With a smaller, more intimate group, members might better gage how people perceive their contributions. However, fewer people also means that posts are

much more noticeable. This could be a problem for members who are unsure of their contributions. This echoes the duality of participation/reification presented by Wenger (1998), where the documentation of discussions can reduce the negotiation of meaning and content can be misunderstood.

This is an issue of trust, which the LFPD participants brought up in their interviews. They appeared to have trust in their fellow LFPD participants as professionals, which aligns with Wenger's duality of local/global. Materials created by a LF teacher are more likely to match the needs of another LF teacher in the same district, or even province. Carol explained that she trusts the units and plans created by her colleagues, because she knows that they were created with the same learning outcomes that she works with. Alice, who was most opposed to the idea of including technology at the end of the study, expressed that she would absolutely use lesson plans that the group provides online. All of the LFPD participants expressed openness to sharing their units with each other, and experienced doing so in person. What was the difference online?

As previously discussed, many of the teachers did not store their lessons as computer documents. Rather, they had binders and files that often consist of documents from various sources. It takes time to formally convert these into a plan that can be shared online. Not only would the teacher have to type up the ideas and describe how the different elements would be used together, but also it would take time to scan the images or to create a list of resources used. If the resources came from another teacher, and were in hard copy form, it would take time to scan or type those as well. Moreover, a teacher typing up a unit plan for

the purpose of sharing would have to take extra time to ensure that the plans would make sense to another person, whereas an outline might suffice for individual use.

In Mouzakis' look at blended professional development, the teachers were focused on learning how to incorporate technology into their practice (2004). This was also the case with the CATIE study (Holmes et al., 2005). Both of these studies had more success with participants using technology effectively. It could be that the LFPD usage of technology differed in that the goals of the LFPD were different. Instead of focusing on a group of teachers wanting to increase and improve the way technology was used in their classroom, the teachers in question were focused on other areas of their teaching. The common factor amongst the teachers was the Late French Immersion program that they were teaching, not the use of technology in the classroom.

It could also be that the lack of choice on the part of the participants, choice of using technology and of type of technology, influences whether it is used or not. With Schwen and Hara's case studies (2004) and the LFPD, the online environment was constructed for the participants. Even if the design is based on user needs, the structure is still imposed upon users. This could result in an interface that is difficult for the participants to use, or just does not appeal to participants. Wenger's duality of designed/emergent (1998) encompasses this issue, where top down systems such as an online space can be less meaningful to users. Although the LFPD users were given options and opportunities to set

up their online environment, options were given within an already created system.

The participants displayed optimism about the potential that technology holds for professional development (Theme 9), but this positivity did not transfer to its use. It could be that the range of possibilities was too great, rendering it difficult for the teachers to find a good fit between needs and possibilities. Initially, the LFPD participants expressed an interest in discussing with fellow participants through the use of forums and wikis. During their final interviews, LFPD participants indicated that they would be willing to respond to requests for advice or material. The LFPD participants did not actively post questions and did not seek advice themselves, nor did they mention wanting to. Although the LFPD participants explicitly stated that discussing shared unit plans was beneficial, they also explained that face-to-face was their preferred venue for this. The potential use of the online environment was narrowed, in the participants' eyes, to an online database of lesson plans (Theme 10). The difference between the LFPD online environment and any other database would be that the teachers using it would know that the source of the lesson plans can be trusted. The LFPD participants changing views about how technology can be used may contribute to the argument for the need to design online environments in conjunction with program designers. Teachers could articulate their needs to program designers, who have a broader spectrum of knowledge about the available tools for online environments. As described by Hewitt (2004), the software used must match the goal of its use.

Limitations of the Study

In this section, I discuss limitations of my study: duration of the study, the use of online space and the participants used in the study.

The study went from October 2009 to June 2010, and was comprised of five scheduled meetings. Four of these meetings, which took place either during or after work hours, were focused on professional development. The fifth of these meetings was brief and ended after I described the interview process. It could be said that the time spent looking at the LFPD is not long enough to obtain a rich understanding of how the teachers viewed their experience. While extending the study to look at the LFPD over two years could give me a deeper understanding, the LFPD ran for eight months – just two months short of a school year. Moreover, the teachers were not formally meeting before the LFPD, but the majority of the teachers had met and had worked together. They were comfortable working with each other, thus reducing the time spent getting to know each other and maximizing the time spent on professional development and discussions. I was well known to all the LFPD participants as well, which could have contributed to their openness when writing in their participant logs or discussing during interviews. Moreover, the teachers are already planning for future meetings. This demonstrates that their interest in working together and in the LFPD is a vested one that extends beyond helping a colleague with their research.

One of the goals of this study was to understand how teachers experienced the LFPD, a blended model. The set up was indeed blended, and

the Moodle site was carefully selected for the options and the privacy that it provided. The selection was made in part, as well, due to the ease of its use. While I made this selection, however, I did so with the assumption about the LFPD participants' level of comfort with technology. After a demonstration on how to use it, and the participants had spent some time with the Moodle site, it became apparent that there was a lack of use. Participant logs and comments made during meetings pointed to a lack of easy access and a frustration with the ease of use. Because of this, the group decided to switch to a blog in order to maintain an online space while cutting back on some of the difficulties the group was experiencing. All the LFPD participants participated in some form on the blog, but the frequency of use was still low. The switch could have had negative effects on online participation, and it took time to introduce new technology and to learn how to use it. Moreover, the frustrations that the participants had may have influenced their view of using technology as part of the LFPD early on. The initial push to explore and use the online component could have been lost in the technological issues and lack of participation.   Thus it is important to emphasize that not possible to know if the lack of use of the online elements is simply a result of problematic technologies or reflective of larger challenges in using technology to support teacher professional development

The nature of the participants in this study present limitations as well. The number of participants was small, which could have affected participant experience several ways. A larger pool of participants could result in a very different experience. It could be that a higher number of participants increases

the difficultly of getting to know other members, thus making it more difficult to build trust and comfort in sharing. On the other hand, a higher number of participants could also result in greater activity online and face-to-face, as there are more people to interact with.

The participants could also be viewed as unique in that they teach the same program, but are isolated from one another. In many cases, teachers collaborate with other teachers who are physically near to them, usually at the same school. The practice of collaborating with teachers within a school is often supported by structured collaboration periods built into the schedule, such as during a professional day. The close physical proximity also supports this collaboration, as teachers can create face-to-face discussion opportunities faster and easier by meeting at during lunch or after school. There may be a limited number of groups of teachers, working at separate schools, who would seek each other out to engage in prolonged professional development. Teachers from separate schools are more likely to gather at district level professional development opportunities, which tend to be more top down, pre-structured occasions. This could greatly affect the direction in which teachers choose to take their professional development. In district run opportunities, the teachers have choice in that they elect to register for particular sessions, but have less control over the direction in which the opportunity develops. The lack of teacher self-direction could have different effects on their experience. They may be less passionate and driven in maintaining collaboration and contact with other teachers.

Implications for Research and Practice

This study has implications for further research and practice. This study looked at how teachers experienced a professional development opportunity structured to be blended, sustained, teacher-driven, grounded in practice and collaborative. It focused on a group of teachers in the late French immersion program who did not have same grade colleagues of the same program in the same school. How would the teacher experiences change if the group of teachers were in the same school and had the possibility of easier access to one another? For example, how would a group of secondary school teachers experience a professional development opportunity structured in the same way? Many schools have teachers who want to collaborate on action research or unit plans.

Also of interest would be the familiarity of members with one another. In this study, the teachers were linked by program and by district. Several of the LFPD participants knew each other prior to participating in the LFPD. What would happen if the group opened up to include teachers from other districts? What would happen if a group was formed based on teachers signing up for a similar opportunity, where they do not necessarily know each other in advance?

During the course of the study, the teachers changed technologies for the online site, starting with a Moodle site and switching to a blog. Part of the frustration that the teachers experienced with the initial site was the inability to use the forums while at work, due to firewall issues. It would be interesting to see how being able to use the forum function could impact the use of an online

tool. It would also be worth looking at different technologies in general to see how receptive teachers are to using them. For example, instead of using Moodle or a blog, looking at how other social networking tools, such as Facebook, or professional networking tools, such as Linked In, might be of use as an online tool.

In the quest to better understand how online tools might support teacher professional development, an exploration of how teachers plan and develop lessons would be worthwhile. During the course of this study, the teachers revealed that their style of planning lessons was not conducive to sharing lessons online. This is not something that was mentioned in previous studies, and could be very influential on a group's use of an online environment. It is not known if this could be a common trend among teachers in general or is a trait specific to the group of teachers who participated in the LFPD. In order to create a blended model that is useful to teachers, it is important to know what elements would be of actual use to teachers.

Findings from this study can be shared with the school board. Elements of what teachers found helpful, such as meeting times and dates or the ways in which teachers scheduled their sharing time, could aid in the organization of professional development opportunities. The theory that was used as the foundation of developing the LFPD, having a professional development opportunity that is blended, sustained, teacher-driven, grounded in practice and collaborative can also be incorporated into the development of professional development programs within the district. Coming from a more bottom-up

approach, groups of teachers seeking to find opportunities to work together may want to incorporate elements of the LFPD into their own model.

A group wanting to implement a professional development opportunity such as the LFPD might want to consider the struggles with the blended aspect of it. Based on the positivity shown by the LFPD participants about the possibilities of the online environment, it would not be productive to eliminate the online component entirely. Taking time, especially initially, to work with the collaborating teachers to discover what their online needs and expectations are in order to set up an environment that they are likely to use, is important. Providing the possibility of keeping in touch outside of face-to-face meetings opens a door for members. Deciding whether or not they choose to enter into and use the online space is up to the members to decide.

Conclusion

Teaching is constantly evolving, and teachers often strive to improve their practice and find new ways of sharing knowledge with students. Professional development opportunities are a way for teachers to do this (Shroyer et al., 2007). There are various theories about what professional development should include in order to fulfil its purpose. This study sought to understand how teachers experienced a blended, sustained, teacher-driven, grounded in practice and collaborative professional development opportunity. A case study of a group of late French teachers, working at different schools, was conducted to understand how the LFPD participants felt about their experiences with the LFPD.

The results showed that the teachers valued their time with the LFPD. Their experience impacted their immediate practice, as the teachers were able to exchange lesson plans and ideas. The LFPD also inspired teachers to think about their long-term practice, considering the way in which they organized units or structured their lessons. In addition, the teachers were able to get to know their fellow LF teachers and share their thoughts and problems with other people who had similar experiences. The experience formed a young CoP, where the LFPD was not just a group of people who met, but also a community of teachers developing their practice.

Pulitzer prize-winning author Tracy Kidder said,

Most teachers have little control over school policy or curriculum or choice of texts or special placement of students, but most have a great deal of autonomy inside the classroom. To a degree shared by only a few other occupations, such as police work, public education rests precariously on the skill and virtue of the people at the bottom of the institutional pyramid.

The LFPD was an opportunity for a group of teachers passionate about their profession and their program to work, discuss and plan together with the ultimate goal of continuous learning and improvement.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Office of Research Ethics Approval

Approved
Date: 13 August 2009
File: [2009s0300]
Title: Fostering a Community of Practice: Teachers' Experience of a Blended
Model of Professional Development: Education
Principal Investigator (PI): Chu, Michelle
Supervisor: Wise, Alyssa
SFU Status of PI: Graduate Student
Department: Education
Project Risk: Minimal
Project Start Date: 13 August 2009
Project End Date: 13 August 2012

Hello Michelle,
Your application has been categorized as 'minimal risk"" and approved by the
Director, Office of Research Ethics, on behalf of the Research Ethics Board in
accordance with University policy.

The Board reviews and may amend decisions made independently by the
Director, Chair or Deputy Chair, at their regular monthly meetings.

Hal Weinberg, Ph.D.
Director, Office of Research Ethics

Appendix B – Consent Form

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Title: Fostering a Community of Practice: Teacher's Experience of a Blended Model of Professional Development

Investigator: **Michelle Chu**   mjchu@sfu.ca

Senior Supervisor: **Dr. Alyssa Wise**   afw3@sfu.ca

Invitation
You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide if you are willing to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask me questions if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What Is The Purpose Of The Study?
Professional development can enhance teacher practice. There are several factors that may increase the professional development experience, including continued interaction with the material covered, teacher directed professional development, applying learning to practice and collaboration with other teachers. This study offers you the opportunity to take part in a professional development model that incorporates these concepts in a blended model of face-to-face interaction and online interaction. The goal is to understand how teachers structure, use and experience this model.

What Do You Have to Do?
As part of this study, you are invited to participate in four face-to-face sessions after school. The first face-to-face session will consist of a focus group about your expectations about the professional development and what you would like to do in future face-to-face sessions. You will also have time to sign up for, explore and organize the online environment that the group will use. The agenda for the following three face-to-face sessions will be determined by group interest. After each face-to-face meeting, you will be asked to take five to ten minutes to record your thoughts in a participant log. These logs will be collected after each face-to-face meeting and stored in a locked filing cabinet.

You are also invited to use the online environment. Your frequency and form of use is up to you and the group to discuss. This online environment is password protected and open only to the other people participating in the group.

After five months, you will be asked to participate in an interview that should last no longer than 90 minutes.

After I have analysed the data, I will be contacting you for a final interview to ensure that my interpretations are accurate representations of your experience. This will take no longer than 90 minutes.

How Do I Decide If I Want To Take Part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign this consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving any reason. If you would rather not participate in the study, you are still welcome to participate in the face-to-face sessions and online environment.

Can You Be Asked To Leave The Study?

If you are not complying with the requirements of the study or for any other reason, the researchers may withdraw you from the study.

What Are The Benefits Of Taking Part?

Some potential benefits of using the tools provided are that you may have a means of communicating and collaborating with other teachers, as well as a way of accessing or sharing new ideas and lesson plans. Discussion regarding teacher practice or styles may enhance your teaching practice.

What Are The Possible Disadvantages and Risks of Taking Part?

The Investigator foresees no risk, actual or potential, in your taking part in this research study. Participating in the face-to-face sessions and in the online environment will require some time commitment on your part, although there are no minimum or maximum time requirements for participants. Every precaution is taken to ensure that the online environment is secure and encrypted, but no system is truly secure.

Will Participation In This Study Be Kept Confidential?

By consenting to participate in the focus group you confirm that any information you encounter will be kept confidential and not revealed to parties outside the focus group. I will keep any information that identifies you strictly confidential. All documents, including participant logs, online responses, field notes and audio recordings will be kept in a password protected file on a memory stick in a locked filing cabinet. You will not be identified by name in any reports, publications or presentations resulting from this study.

Where Can Results Be Obtained?

You can contact the Investigator at mjchu@sfu.ca to obtain the results.

To whom Are Concerns Or Complaints Directed?

You can contact Dr Hal Weinberg, Director, Office of Research at hal_weinberg@sfu.ca or 778-782-6593 if you have any concerns or complaints.

Why Are You Signing This Consent Form?
By signing this consent form, you agree that:
- You have read and understood the information in the consent form and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- The investigator has answered your questions to your satisfaction.
- You understand your participation is voluntary and that you may refuse to participate or you are free to withdraw at any time.
- You agree to take part in this study.
- You will receive a copy of the consent form for your records.

SIGNATURES

Subject Name (please print)	Date (written by subject)

Subject Signature