MEANINGFUL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: PERCEPTIONS OF A TEACHER STUDY GROUP

by

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Abstract

The value of study groups as part of teachers’ professional development is beyond dispute in the literature (Birchak et al., 1998; Florio-Ruane & Raphael, 2001; Joyce, Murphy, Showers, & Murphy, 1989). The purpose of this thesis was to examine teacher values in professional development and to determine whether responses differed between teachers in a literacy study group and teachers who did not attend the study group. Furthermore, to assist the study group with its annual feedback and evaluation process, study group members were also asked to report the extent they perceived each listed characteristic of professional development to exist in the study group. The findings of the study were based on the results from 45 surveys completed by study group members (n=26) and comparison group participants (n=19), and from seven follow-up interviews with study group members.

The survey, a combination of Likert-scale and open-ended questions, and the teacher interview questions were developed from themes on teacher professional development represented in the literature. Both instruments were then validated in two stages, including input from four school district administrators. From participants’ responses to the 26 Likert-scale questions, six categories were developed conceptually and then tested using multiple correlations and Cronbach alpha tests. The six categories were: Learning Culture, Critical Inquiry/Application, Career Path, Relevance, Content/Methods, and Peer Learning.

A Repeated Measures ANOVA found that three categories, Learning Culture, Critical Inquiry/Application, and Career Path, were rated statistically higher than categories Relevance, Content/Methods, and Peer Learning, for both study and comparison group
participants. *Learning Culture* was ranked the highest and *Peer Learning* the lowest but all six mean scores ranked above the mid-point score on the Likert scale, which suggests that all components professional development were important. There were some differences between study and comparison groups. Study group participants tended to rate Likert items higher, and an independent t-test showed that study group members ranked the categories *Learning Culture* and *Career Path* statistically higher than comparison group respondents did.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................... ii

Table of Contents ............................................................................................. iv

List of Tables ...................................................................................................... viii

Acknowledgements ............................................................................................ ix

Chapter I: Introduction ....................................................................................... 1
- Problem Statement ......................................................................................... 1
- Literature Review .......................................................................................... 2
- Thesis Rationale ............................................................................................ 3
- Research Questions ....................................................................................... 4
- Methodology .................................................................................................. 5
- Definitions ...................................................................................................... 5
- Delimitations .................................................................................................. 6
- Thesis Outline ................................................................................................. 6

Chapter II: Literature Review ........................................................................... 7
- The Teacher Workplace .................................................................................. 9
  - Isolation, Individualism, Individuality .......................................................... 9
  - Collaboration ............................................................................................... 15
  - Rewards and Motivation in Teaching ........................................................ 17
- Criticisms of Traditional Professional Development .................................. 19
- Characteristics of Effective Professional Development ......................... 21
  - Meaningful Goal Setting ......................................................................... 21
  - Rooted in Best Available Research ........................................................... 22
  - High Teacher Involvement ....................................................................... 22
  - School Based .............................................................................................. 23
  - Collaborative and Collegial ...................................................................... 24
  - Ongoing and Supported .......................................................................... 26
  - Builds on Teacher Expertise ...................................................................... 27
  - Practical ...................................................................................................... 28
  - Examines Teacher Beliefs and Makes Theory to Practice Connections .. 28
  - Part of a Comprehensive Change Process ................................................. 30
- Study Groups as a Meaningful Framework ............................................... 30
- Study Group Definition and Organization ................................................. 31
- Characteristics and Benefits of Study Groups ........................................... 32
  - Voluntary, Ongoing, and Cohesive ............................................................ 33
  - Active Teacher Involvement ...................................................................... 34
  - Collaborative and Collegial ...................................................................... 35
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examine Beliefs and Connects Theory to Practice</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Motivation and Reward</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional and Personal Growth</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Achievement</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Examples of Study Groups From the Literature</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaps in the Research</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Voice</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied Members</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Differences</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Current Study</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter III: Methodology</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeline for Collecting Data</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Survey</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Interview</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire and Interview Development</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Rating Scales</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegial and Collaborative</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linking Theory to Practice and Examining Beliefs</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Support</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection and Goal Setting</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expertise</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Open-ended Questions</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Open-ended Questions</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation and Piloting</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating Independent Groupings</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Variables</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed Consent and Confidentiality/Anonymity</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter IV: Findings</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographics</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouping of Likert Items</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Gender</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Years Teaching</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Grade Level</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Group</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priority Rankings</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Grade Level</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Group</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Practice</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for the Study Group</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Research</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Study group cover letter</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Study group Survey</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C: On-leave member cover letter</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D: On-leave member survey</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E: Comparison group cover letter</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F: Comparison group survey</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix G: UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board Review</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix H: School district permission letter</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix I: Interview consent form</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix J: Interview schedule</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 1: Topics and the Corresponding Survey Questions ................................................. 53
Table 2: Six Groupings and Their Corresponding Questions, Correlation Range, and
Significance Level ........................................................................................................ 68
Table 3: Demographics of Respondents ........................................................................... 74
Table 4: Demographics of Study Group Members .............................................................. 74
Table 5: Comparison Group Participants in an Alternate Study Group, By Years
Teaching .......................................................................................................................... 76
Table 6: Means of Six Groupings for Total Sample on Five Point Likert Scale ............... 77
Table 7: Mean Numbers of Six Groupings for the Complete Sample, By Gender, Years of
Experience, Grade Level and Group ................................................................................. 79
Table 8: Means of Groupings By Group ............................................................................ 82
Table 9: Questions Ranked as a Top Five Priority, by Gender, Grade Level, Years
Teaching .......................................................................................................................... 83
Table 10: Top Five Ranked Priorities in Professional Development by Group ................. 87
Table 11: Infrequently Ranked Priorities by Group ............................................................ 97
Table 12: Likert Response Means and Standard Deviations for Length of Commitment by
Gender, Years Teaching, Grade Level, and Group .......................................................... 113
Table 13: Crosstabulation of Commitment Level Rating on Five Point Likert Scale by
Group ............................................................................................................................... 114
Table 14: Means and Standard Deviations of Ratings of Importance and Existence for
Each of the Six Groupings ............................................................................................... 125
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I: Introduction

Problem Statement

Substantial effort has been committed to understanding the social organization of schools (Lortie, 2002; Rosenholtz, 1991) and to developing best practices in teacher professional development (see Hawley & Valli, 1999). Preservice teacher training simply cannot anticipate future changes in curriculum, research on teaching and learning, diverse learning styles, or a change in teaching position (Knight, 2002). Although there are examples of schools that serve as mediums of rich technical exchange, ongoing learning, and collegial support (Rosenholtz, 1991), this is not a reality in most schools (Fullan, 2001; Lortie, 2002).

Teaching is not a self-evident job (Kennedy, 1999), and the knowledge base required to be an effective practitioner in today’s schools has significantly increased (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves, 1994). Much agreement exists on the characteristics of professional development that effectively address the social organization of schools and the complexity of teachers’ work. Effective professional development is ongoing, site based (Fullan, 2001; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Richardson, 2003), collaborative (Little, 1993), collegial (Richardson, 2003), practical (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Suk Yoon, 2001), theoretical (Hawley & Valli, 1999), and cohesive (Elmore & Burney, 1999). It is also rooted in best available research (The American Federation of Teachers, 2002), actively involves teachers in their learning (Fullan, 2001), harnesses and develops teacher expertise (Hawley & Valli, 1999), and develops shared goals that address discrepancies between
student expectations and performance (Hawley & Valli, 1999).

The purpose of this study is to ask teachers who participate in an ongoing study group, and teachers in a comparison group, what they value in a professional development experience. The responses of the two groups are then compared. Originally, a second purpose of this study was to examine the role of the facilitator in the study group, as perceived by both the participants and the facilitator himself. However, after re-examining my original purpose of the study, I determined that this was not relevant to my goal of understanding what teachers value in their professional learning. Furthermore, it became apparent that the responses of the participants had the potential to be evaluative, through unintended, and this was not desired.

Literature Review

The literature in this review is divided into four sections. The first section explores research into the social organization of schools, norms of isolation and collaboration, and how these factors may contribute to the way teachers experience their work. Next, the failings of traditional professional development to meet teacher needs are addressed, and this is followed by a review of characteristics of effective professional development, as agreed on in the literature.

Finally, the study group as a possible framework for meaningful professional development, its organization, characteristics, and benefits is presented. Four examples of successful study groups are shared and a description of gaps in the research is discussed. The chapter closes
with an introduction to the current study and conclusions from the review.

Thesis Rationale

Despite the massive attention given to teacher professional development, very little has changed since Lortie’s study 30 years ago (Fullan, 2001; Lortie, 2002). Before changes can be made in schools, it is necessary to understand the organization of schools, teachers’ work, and the meanings teachers give to their work (Lortie, 2002). Lortie (2002) and Rosenholtz (1991) reveal that teachers are both physically and psychologically isolated in their workplaces and this prevents the establishment of a strong technical culture. Left to learn by trial-and-error, teachers experience uncertainty in their work (Lortie, 2002). This is especially trying for beginning teachers, who after an abrupt apprenticeship, find themselves with the same responsibilities as veteran teachers.

Lortie (2002) identifies several norms in the teacher workplace that parallel my own experience. I commenced post-graduate studies in response to the uncertainty I felt as a beginning teacher. A beginning teacher with low seniority, I had just been force-transferred from a school that was physically and culturally amiable to collaboration (open-area classrooms), to a school where I was isolated in a classroom at the end of the hall with few teachers willing to collaborate. The only access I had to new ideas and ways to cope with my daily responsibilities was through school-wide workshops, district workshops and provincial conferences. These were usually one to two days in length and provided little to no follow-up, and in the case of the school workshops, chosen by the previous year’s staff. Often these
experiences did not relate to what I was working on in my classroom and did not provide an ongoing network of ideas and support.

My frustration with the one-day transmission model of professional development is corroborated by the literature (Crockett, 2002; Holm & Horn, 2003; Knight, 2002; Richardson, 2003). Knowing this, I approached a district consultant about initiating some kind of group of teachers where we could get together and share our knowledge and skills. After attending this study group for just over a year, I wanted to know whether other group members found the group as valuable as I did and what meanings they attached to their learning. Studying teacher preferences for professional development will continue to inform my understanding of best practice in teacher professional development and will help our study group provide meaningful learning to our members.

Research Questions

This study addresses five research questions.

1. In general, what do teachers in a literacy study group form a Lower Mainland, British Columbian school district value in a professional development experience?
2. What do teachers in a literacy study group specifically value about their study group?
3. To what extent do the participants perceive that these values are represented in their study group?
4. How do members of a literacy study group perceive they have benefited from participating in the study group?
5. How do values and priorities of professional development compare between study group members and comparison group participants?

Methodology

Information used in this study was gathered through the use of surveys and interviews. Three different sample groups were invited to complete a survey: active study group members (Appendix B); on-leave study members (Appendix D); and a group of comparison teachers (Appendix F). The surveys comprised both open-ended questions and 26 likert-scale questions. Interviews (Appendices I and J) were conducted with seven members of the study groups and the data were used to corroborate and substantiate the survey data.

Definitions

Beliefs: “...Members of an occupation develop beliefs (implicit as well as explicit) to account for events which are important to them” (Lortie, 2002, p. 162).

Collegiality: Borrowing from Fullan’s (2001) measure of collegiality, collegiality refers to “...communication, mutual support, help, and so forth” (p. 124) for teachers.

Professional Development: “Professional development is a continuous process of individual and collective examination and improvement of practice” (American Federation of Teachers [AFT], 2002, p. 4).

Study group: Study groups are a model of professional development where educators come together regularly seeking to explore a common interest or problem through collaborative
inquiry in a supportive (Le Fevre & Richardson, 2002) and equitable (Sanacore, 1993) environment, where meaning is co-constructed (Carroll, 2001).

Values: Values are defined here as the recognition of worth or the usefulness of something (MacDonald, 1978).

Delimitations

This study examines the values and priorities of participants; it does not examine changes made in practice as a result of participating in the study group. Furthermore, neither group was randomly selected. Participants in the study group were invited to participate because I was a member of the group. These teachers make an ongoing commitment to read education literature, experiment with new ideas in their classrooms, and attend monthly meetings. In this way they are perhaps unique and the findings generated from these data are limited to other professionally active teachers. Similarly, the comparison group was also professionally active; two-thirds of the participants reported that they attend a study group (other than the one being studied). Similar limitations of findings apply to the comparison group.

Thesis Outline

In addition to the literature presented in Chapter II, Chapter III discusses the methodology used, the development of the survey and interview schedule, and the data analysis procedure are outlined. Next, Chapter IV presents the findings of this study, and then Chapter V explores conclusions and implications of the data.
II: Literature Review

The massive attention given to educational reform and teacher professional development has yet to make wide-spread and sustainable changes in schools (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 2001). Reform movements and in-service models have been, until recently, externally driven, and top-down, and have neglected to include teachers in their own change process (Fullan, 2001). To engage teachers meaningfully and effectively in professional development, it is first necessary to examine the organizational context in which they work (Rosenholtz, 1991). The examination into research on ‘effective schools’ provides information on not only the daily working conditions of teachers, but insight into what teachers value in professional development and why that is meaningful to them. For example, a teacher in a school where there is little collaboration and shared vision may be unwilling to participate in a collaborative professional learning experience, either due to lack of perceived value in it, or a perceived threat to their self-esteem (Rosenholtz, 1991). It is reasonable to think that teachers in this school may value collaborative experiences less than teachers who work in highly collaborative teaching situations.

Shifts away from the factory model view of teacher work (DuFour & Eaker, 1998) and the deficit model of teacher learning (Clark & Florio-Ruane, 2001), have resulted in changes in design and delivery of professional development (Hawley & Valli, 1999). Effective professional development recognizes that teacher professional development must offer more
than standardized and prescriptive workshops (AFT, 2002) in order to equip teachers with
the knowledge and skills to meet the diverse range of social, economic and intellectual realities
they encounter in their classrooms (Fullan, 2001). The literature is quite clear: the short-term
transmission model is not as relevant and meaningful to teachers as is more on-going, inquiry
based models of professional development (Crockett, 2002; Holm & Horn, 2003; Knight,
2002; Richardson, 2003).

Study groups offer teachers several of the characteristics of professional development
outlined in the literature as effective. Study groups are voluntary and ongoing, provide active
teacher involvement, engage teachers collaboratively, build collegiality, and connect theory
with practice (Birchak et al., 1998). There are also several benefits to participating in a study
group. Some of these are increased student performance (Makibbin & Sprague, 1991), time
and access to collaboration and a supportive learning environment (Birchak et al., 1998),
increased teacher agency, leadership (Florio-Ruane & Raphael, 2001), and the development of
a strong voice in advocacy (McDonald, 1986).

This review will discuss the teacher workplace, criticisms of traditional professional
development models, and characteristics of effective professional development that
meaningfully address teacher needs, and finally, present the study group as a fitting example
of effective professional development for teachers. The gaps in the literature and an
introduction to the current study will also be discussed. Finally, a summary of the literature
will conclude the chapter.
Teacher Workplace

Isolation, Individualism, and Individuality

For many teachers, schools are isolating environments to work in (Hawley & Valli, 1999). Thirty years ago, Lortie (2002) published his original 1975 study of the teacher workplace. Unlike professions such as law and medicine where professionals have access to a strong technical culture, teachers lack commonly shared skills, procedures, and methods (Lortie, 2002; Rosenholtz, 1991). Lortie (2002) suggests this is due to two factors. First, teachers suffer from short apprenticeships where upon hiring they are abruptly given the same responsibilities as a veteran teacher. Second, teachers, both beginning and experienced, are psychologically and physically isolated from the knowledge and skills of their colleagues. This strong culture of isolation, Lortie (2002) claims, results in increased teacher uncertainty and decreased potential for a strong and collective teacher voice on educational matters.

A decade later, in her comprehensive study of “effective” schools and the teacher workplace, Rosenholtz (1991) examined 78 elementary schools in Tennessee and categorized the workplace of 15 of these schools as isolated, and 50 as moderately isolated. She found that in schools with shared goals and opportunities to collaborate and engage in continued learning, teachers were more likely to have high certainty of a teaching technical culture and view learning as a collective and ongoing process. In contrast, teachers in schools with no shared goals and few opportunities for collaboration and continued learning were more likely to be uncertain about a common technical culture and to view their professional learning as an
individual and short-term process (Rosenholtz, 1991).

Before changes can be made in schools, such as reducing isolation for teachers, it is necessary to understand the organization of schools and the meaning teachers give to their tasks (Lortie, 2002). According to Rosenholtz (1991), isolation is difficult to overcome because many teachers fear appearing professionally incompetent in front of colleagues. Thus, she claims, avoidance of, or refusal to participate, in collaborative events can be attributed to efforts to preserve self-esteem. Rosenholtz (1991) writes:

To the extent that teachers lack technical knowledge and control of their ability to help students learn, they are less apt to ask for assistance. Uncertainty also tends to undermine teachers’ willingness to offer assistance to those experiencing difficulty. If offering or requesting aid threatens to disclose some kind of professional inadequacy, it appears that teachers, like other people, simply avoid it. (p. 46)

Joyce et al. (1989) conducted a multi-year investigation into a school-wide study groups and similarly argue that the least competent teachers are most often inadequately prepared for collaborative activities and as such, resist coming in the first place. Joyce et al. (1989) write:

The collegial setting is least satisfying to the least-prepared teachers, whose shaky hold on subject matter and uninspired teaching is unmasked in the collegial environment. This is necessary but sad; and it takes a long time to remedy, for the least competent teachers learn both subject matter and teaching practices more slowly than do the others. It is natural that they would want to hide in their classrooms. (p. 77)
There are consequences to isolation. First, isolated in their classrooms, teachers are left to learn on their own through experience (Lortie, 2002; Rosenholtz, 1991). The problem with trial and error learning is that improvements in instruction depend entirely on an individual’s ability to determine problems, devise solutions, select courses of action, implement, and then assess outcomes (Lortie, 2002). Second, teachers experience uncertainty about how to assess and best meet student needs (Lortie, 2002). Third, teachers in schools lacking in a strong technical culture and teacher certainty blame poor student performance on external factors such as parents and students’ fixed learning potential, compared to teachers from learning-enriched schools who tended to view all students as capable learners (Rosenholtz, 1991). Rosenholtz (1991) explains why teachers in these collaborative schools have this outlook:

> Teachers instead proclaim their sense of confidence. They appear to know just where they stand and seem sure of the foundations below them – their already existing technical culture and their knowledge of how to expand it. (p. 138)

Similarly, McLaughlin’s (1993) study of departmental communities of practice found that departments with norms of collegiality and collaboration were supportive, social, motivating, and professionally dynamic and innovative. Teachers in these departments view all students as capable learners given the right strategy. In departments with norms of privacy and low collegiality, McLaughlin (1993) discusses how teachers see their work as routine and static, are less motivated, and are more likely to hold lower expectations of students. Finally, Rosenholtz (1991) also found that teacher certainty contributes to students learning of basic skills.
The need to overcome isolation is supported by research (Lortie, 2002; McLaughlin, 1993; Rosenholtz, 1991), but Hargreaves (1994) argues that research that links the psychological constructs of uncertainty and anxiety to teacher individualism, is weak. Alternative explanations for isolation need to be found (Hargreaves, 1994), and these explanations must also consider the norm of individualism in the broader societal context that exists beyond school walls (Richardson, 2003). Hargreaves (1994) criticizes Rosenholtz’s (1991) explanation for isolation: avoidance of threats to one’s self-esteem, because it does not take into account the multiple meanings of isolation. Hargreaves (1994) writes:

Rosenholtz shifts almost imperceptibly from this use of uncertainty as a property of social organization to its use as a psychological quality of teachers themselves where teachers are claimed to feel certain or uncertain. In this way, a perfectly legitimate use of uncertainty to describe the loose articulation of goals and purposes in the social organization of “isolated” settings becomes subtly transformed into a defective psychological quality with strong insinuations of individual deficit and personal disorganization. (p. 168)

Alternatively, Hargreaves (1994) accounts for isolation by breaking individualism into three categories: constrained individualism, strategic individualism, and elective individualism. Whereas constrained individualism refers to administrative or situational constraints on collaboration, and strategic individualism relates to the ways teachers have adapted their work in response to the lack of available preparation time and increasing pressures of the job, elective individualism refers to “the principled choice to work alone, all or some of the time,
and sometimes even in circumstances where there are opportunities and encouragement to work collaboratively with colleagues” (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 172). The third category will be discussed with more elaboration than the first two.

Lortie (2002) reports that teachers sometimes prefer to work alone rather than work with colleagues, even when additional time is provided. In discussing reasons why teachers may prefer to work alone, Hargreaves (1994) explains that some teachers may prefer isolation because they are motivated by a moral obligation to care for and nurture students, and they see themselves as the best people to do this. This is much like Lortie’s (2002) concept of psychic rewards. Thus, teachers will be more motivated by collaborative work that is perceived as contributing to teachers’ sense of care for their students than a perceived collegial responsibility to collaborate (Hargreaves, 1994). Hargreaves (1994) notes that by treating individualism, isolation, and privatism as psychological deficits, interpretations of teacher resistance will be placed on the teacher and not the social organization of schools and the system. This does not mean, however, that teachers are blameless, but rather the research that claims individualism as a psychological deficit is not proven (Hargreaves, 1994).

Attempts to eliminate individualism from schools need to proceed carefully, for individualism has its supporters (Hargreaves, 1994; Richardson, 2003). Not all teachers thrive on collegiality and collaborative experiences; some teachers prefer solitude, where they find their creativity flourishes (Hargreaves, 1994). Individuality, or “the power to exercise independent, discretionary judgement,” is linked with teachers’ sense of competence (Hargreaves, 1994, p.
Unlike the findings reported in Rosenholtz (1991) where shared goals and collaboration had the benefit of increasing teacher certainty, Richardson (2003) notes that teachers who work independently may be more satisfied with their careers than those heavily involved in bigger initiatives. Richardson (2003) writes:

In fact, there is research indicating that teachers who avoid involvement in school wide or district reform programs and “tinker” with change in their own classrooms are much more satisfied with their careers later in life than are those who are heavily involved in such projects. (402)

Furthermore, Richardson (2003) stresses the necessity of recognizing the role of individualism:

An examination of this issue suggests that the individualistic norm is extremely important in American professional lives. There is a certain sense of expertise, autonomy in practice, and self-efficacy that accompanies this way of life. (406)

Richardson (2003) cautions against over-optimistic reforms that favour standardization and the rule of the majority and argues that different goals will require varying degrees of collaboration. She states:

Here we are again, in the midst of an educational dilemma. The need for some sense of community activity with common goals is apparent today, but we probably shouldn’t have too much of it. What’s more, we must always be careful of the tyranny of the majority – a situation that would certainly come about if we were to attempt to
mandate collectivity. (p. 403)

Like Rosenholtz (1991), Richardson (2003) states that teachers must 'buy into' collective work, but she also notes that not all elements of teaching require collaboration.

While it is important that some collective activities within a school, school district, or state take place, it is probably not necessary for all aspects of teaching. Individual teachers need to see that it is in their own best interests to work together at times. But a forced collectivity could lead to the tyranny of the majority. (p. 406)

Isolation is a reality for teachers (Hawley & Valli, 1999) and yet the impetus to change this comes mostly from those outside of the classroom (Little & McLaughlin, 1993). Many teachers guard their privacy and will only engage in collaborative learning if they perceive enough value in it (Rosenholtz, 1991). The goal then, according to Hargreaves (1994) is to strike a balance between the two: “Vibrant teacher cultures should be able to avoid the professional limitations of teacher individualism, while embracing the creative potential of teacher individuality” (p. 183).

Collaboration

Research into the teacher workplace (Lortie, 2002; Rosenholtz, 1991) indicates that collaboration between teachers benefits teachers, their profession, and the students they teach, but collaborative opportunities are limited (Fullan, 2001). Because opportunities and willingness to engage in sharing vary among schools (Rosenholtz, 1991), most teachers report learning through personal experience and not from other teachers (Lortie, 2002). This occurs
despite evidence that teachers are the preferred source of ideas (Fullan, 2001; Lortie, 2002). Barnes (1992) offers insight into why teachers may resist opportunities to collaborate. His work examines perspectives of teachers, administrators, curriculum developers, and researchers and indicates that differences in perspectives are likely due to differences in priorities. The key, suggests Barnes (1992), is to build mutual trust between professionals and to help them see that their frame of reference is only one of several.

When sharing does occur, teachers prefer their colleagues as their main source of new ideas - new teachers, in particular, prefer those teachers closest to them in rank for feedback and new ideas (Lortie, 2002). This sharing, however, is limited to exchanging 'tricks of the trade', and not underlying conceptual generalizations. Rosenholtz (1991) examines different types of sharing that occur in schools with varied degrees of collaboration. Schools she labels as collaborative report teachers sharing mostly instructional materials and ideas and collaborating on instructional problem-solving and planning. Like Lortie's (2002) findings, teachers in moderately isolated and isolated schools, however, are less likely to problem-solve and co-plan, have fewer reported instances of exchanging instructional materials and ideas, and more reported instances of experience swapping. Unlike collaborative schools, these schools also have reports of no sharing at all.

Furthermore, teachers tend to share ideas with those who are similar in personality and teaching style, and these exchanges neglect to address underlying theory (Lortie, 2002). This small collaborative exchange is soon over as teachers return to their classrooms, and with only
the students present, try out and evaluate the new strategy (Lortie, 2002).

Rosenholtz (1991) also reports that in schools with low goal consensus and norms of self-reliance, teachers' talk focuses on student misbehaviour and poor working conditions. She argues that this type of talk does not help to develop a codified technical knowledge. In schools with high goal consensus, however, where talk revolves around their shared culture - their goals, beliefs, and values - a technical knowledge is fostered (Rosenholtz, 1991).

Rewards and Motivation in Teaching

Establishing a productive or highly motivating workplace depends on three conditions: autonomy and discretion, high psychic rewards, and opportunities for continued learning (Rosenholtz, 1991). Rosenholtz (1991) explains:

In sum, teachers' regard for their work – their sense of optimism, hope, and commitment – tends to reside in workplace conditions that enable them to feel professionally empowered and self-fulfilled, that keep them reaching for new challenges, fresh opportunities, and ever-expanding technical knowledge. (p. 165)

Fullan's (2001) analysis of meaningful educational change reveals a strong need to create positive working conditions where teachers are energized and rewarded for their accomplishments. Currently, teaching is a stressful and alienating profession and demands are showing no sign of slowing down (Fullan, 2001). Fullan (2001) states:

Teacher stress and alienation are at an all-time high, judging from the increase in work-
related illness, and from the numbers of teachers leaving or wanting to leave the profession. The range in educational goals and expectations for schools and the transfer of family and societal problems to the school, coupled with the imposition of multiple, disconnected reform initiatives, present intolerable conditions for sustained educational development and satisfying work experiences. (p. 115)

Where do teachers look for positive reinforcement and motivation in times of stress and disconnection? One consequence of working in a culture of isolation is that teachers look to their students for positive reward, and not to each other (Lortie, 2002). According to Lortie (2002), teachers view themselves as moral and academic agents in students’ lives, investing their energy in their students in the belief that they are building future citizens. The reward from a job well done, therefore, rests with student outcomes. Conversely, Rosenholtz (1991) found that teachers in schools with high collaboration and cohesiveness found interactions between staff rewarding; they found fulfilment from their membership in the school, compared to schools with less collaboration and cohesiveness.

Opportunities for continued learning require time, a luxury for most teachers (Fullan, 2001). Fullan (2001) discusses how the daily reality of most teachers demands much but gives little in the way of “...time needed for planning, constructive discussion, thinking, and just plain rewards and time for composure” (p. 118). Ongoing collaboration with other colleagues provides teachers the opportunity to engage in a supportive, trusting, and collegial learning environment (Birchak et al., 1998).
In sum, teachers remain isolated and have limited opportunities to collaborate with their peers (Fullan, 2001). The nature of the sharing that does take place depends on school norms for shared goals and collaboration (Rosenholtz, 1991). Teachers, consequently, often rely on irregular feedback from success with a student or group of students as their source of reward and motivation (Lortie, 2002).

Understanding norms in the teacher workplace provides insight into what makes meaningful learning for teachers. The extent to which different types of professional development successfully address some of the workplace needs, such as teacher isolation, are noted below.

Criticisms of Traditional Professional Development

Traditional models of professional development are criticized because they typically involve a simplistic telling or transmission of information from one person, the expert, to a group of people, the teachers (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). The factory model, very popular at the turn of the twentieth century, was the inspiration behind the design of the education system (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). In this model, management would do the research and make the decisions, train its workers and then monitor them for correct implementation. DuFour and Eaker (1998) elaborate:

Decisions flowed from state boards of education down the ladder of the educational bureaucracy to local school boards, superintendents, and principals. Eventually, decisions would be directed to teachers who, like factory workers, were viewed as
underlings responsible for carrying out the decisions of their bosses. Students were simply the raw material transported along the educational assembly line. They would be moved to a station where a teacher would "pour" in mathematics until the bell rang; then they would be moved to the next station where another teacher would "assemble" the nuts and bolts of English until the next bell rang, and so on. Those who completed this 13-year trek on the assembly line would emerge as finished products, ready to function efficiently in the industrial world. (p. 21)

This traditional conception of education views teaching and learning as a transmission of goods, requires few pedagogical skills of teachers, and sees teaching as a self-evident job with minimal need for on-going professional training (Hawley & Valli, 1999). But changes in knowledge, technology, and the onset of the global world have made this transmission model, and any framework of professional development that serves it, outdated and ineffective (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 2001; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Richardson, 2003).

The knowledge base required to be an effective practitioner in today's schools has significantly increased (Fullan, 1994; Garet et al., 2001). Students are no longer simply taught to memorize long lists but to work collaboratively, communicate clearly, construct and solve problems and to think critically (Hawley & Valli, 1999). Moreover, living in a global society requires teachers not only to welcome diverse cultures and languages into their classroom but to channel that diversity in meaningful ways (Holm & Horn, 2003). The responsibility to meet these increased expectations in student learning falls on teachers (Garet et al., 2001).
Thus, research into how to best help teachers meet these expectations becomes very important (Garet et al, 2001).

Characteristics of Effective Professional Development

Professional development is changing. Hawley and Valli (1999) describe this as a movement from an in-service that is private, short-term, atheoretical and fragmented, to learning that is shared, long-term, theoretical and connected; from a workshop that relies on an external expert where the teacher is positioned as a passive recipient to learning where expertise is internal and the teachers are expected to take an active role in their learning; from an expectation that teachers will be able to implement their newly acquired skills and measure immediate results, to an understanding that lasting change proceeds slowly. Traditional approaches are not supported in the literature as effective modes of teacher learning (Fullan, 2001; Richardson, 2003).

Several researchers have created lists of principles of effective professional development (AFT, 2002; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Richardson, 2003). I have taken those lists and created ten principles. They are:

Meaningful Goal Setting

First, professional development needs to involve goal setting that is determined by discrepancies between expectations of students and actual student performance (Hawley &
Valli, 1999). Adoption of new teaching strategies, curriculum approaches and organizational design, are subsequently based on identified student needs and not the latest educational fad (Fullan, 2001; Hawley & Valli, 1999); its implementation should result in changes in teacher practice and increases in student achievement (AFT, 2002). Second, professional development also needs to “foster agreement among participants on goals and vision” (Richardson, 2003, p.401). Rosenholtz (1991) found that schools that had developed shared goals were more collaborative and less uncertain about their work.

Rooted in Best Available Research

The American Federation of Teachers (2002) maintains that professional development practices must be supported by research. Best practice, according to the American Federation of Teachers (2002) means that:

Not only must schools and school districts tap this research in shaping the content of professional development programs, but good adult learning theory must also be applied to the delivery of that content. (p. 6)

In other words, both the content and the delivery of the professional development needs to be technically sound (AFT, 2002).

High Teacher Involvement

Effective professional development involves teachers in the identification of their learning needs and, when possible, the development of the learning process (Hawley & Valli, 1999; Little, 1993). If teachers do not have ownership in the change process, change will likely be
rejected or superficially adopted (Fullan, 2001). Teachers might also feel “put upon, manipulated, and not taken seriously as professionals” (Clark & Florio-Ruane, 2001, p. 5). Thus, teachers need to be involved in deciding which innovations are most meaningful and relevant to their classrooms and this can only be successfully accomplished by having teachers take charge of their own learning. (Fullan, 2001; Richardson, 2003). This is especially important given the multiple, often competing, innovations that are presented to teachers and schools at any one time (Fullan, 2001). High teacher involvement, however, does not preclude the participation of external consultants who can bring new ideas and approaches to schools (AFT, 2002).

Hawley and Valli (1999) list six benefits to active teacher involvement: increased motivation and commitment; reinforcement of existing strengths and increased self-efficacy; increased willingness to take instructional risks and assume new roles and responsibilities; deeper engagement in relevant and meaningful learning; improved instruction; and enhanced collaborative school culture.

School Based

Effective professional development is school based (Fullan, 2001; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Richardson, 2003). According to The American Federation of Teachers (1995), “professional development gains power when integrated into every-day work” (p. 10), because learning that relates to daily practice is both meaningful and motivating for teachers (Hawley & Valli, 1999). Teachers should still engage in learning opportunities, such as networks or graduate
study, outside of the school, but "opportunities to learn in powerful ways are most often connected with the recognition of and solution to authentic and immediate problems" (Hawley & Valli, 1999, p.140). The American Federation of Teachers (1995) further argues that site-based learning needs to be part of teachers' regular work-days; school organizations "should promote and provide for continual and purposeful reflection on teaching and learning" (p. 10). Much would need to change given that current norms do not provide time for teacher talk, reflection, and collaboration (Fullan, 2001).

Although much of the research (Fullan, 2001; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Richardson, 2003) suggests that professional development is most effective at the school level, data collected from reform initiatives for sustained improvement in instruction from District 2, a New York City school district with diverse needs, indicate that professional development that pervades all levels of a district (ie., sharing within and between schools, observing within and between schools, and working with district consultants) is also very effective (Elmore & Burney, 1999).

Collaborative and Collegial

Meaningful learning, while still addressing individual needs, centers on collaborative problem solving (Fullan, 1991; Little, 1993; Rosenholtz, 1991). Highly prescriptive professional development inadequately prepares teachers to handle unexpected and complex classroom situations or diverse learning needs (AFT, 2002). As such, The American Federation of Teachers (2002) states:
Good professional development engages teachers in thinking about tough issues and difficult content, in learning with and from colleagues, and in using the resources they will need to use with their students. It engages teachers intellectually with ideas and resources, prepares them to grapple with meaning and with the complex problems they will encounter”. (p. 8)

Collaboration allows teachers to address common interests or concerns, decreases teacher isolation (Hawley & Valli, 1999), and enhances a shared technical culture (Rosenholtz, 1991). Fullan (2001) suggests that by working in small groups, teachers are able to prioritize and then integrate innovations that are most relevant and meaningful to them and their students. Collaborative experiences also help to establish an environment of professional respect (Birchak et al., 1998) and make school change possible (Hawley & Valli, 1999). Achieving a collaborative and cooperative working environment, however, can be challenging (Joyce et al., 1989). Joyce et al., (1989) describe the process of getting teachers interested in and willing to work with each other as complex and uneven. It took strong administrative and teacher leadership, as well as ongoing support of consultants to successfully establish a collaborative workplace (Joyce et al., 1989).

Collegiality also plays an important role in successful teacher professional development (Richardson, 2003). Fullan (2001) argues that because teacher change is strongly associated with opportunities for teachers to purposefully interact and exchange technical help, collegiality is the way to overcome isolation. Fullan (2001) explains that “significant educational change consists of changes in beliefs, teaching style, and materials, which can
come about only through a process of personal development in a social context” (p. 124).

Elmore and Burney (1999) similarly report that collegiality fosters personal and professional respect between colleagues, which in turn, generates enthusiasm, energy, and commitment. In sum, sharing ideas and talking about belief systems requires a trusting environment and establishing such a safe and trusting atmosphere takes time (Hawley & Valli, 1999).

Ongoing and Supported

Effective professional development needs to be ongoing because change takes time, and it needs to provide follow-up and support for further learning (Fullan, 1991; Richardson, 2003). Changes in instructional practice progress through a series of steps: awareness, planning, implementation, and reflecting (Elmore & Burney, 1999). Support for teacher learning can include external support for new perspectives and strategies (Hawley & Valli, 1999; Little & McLaughlin, 1993). “On-going support is especially critical in the first two years of implementation. Unfortunately the public expects to see quick changes in schools and concrete evidence of improvements in student achievement,” (Hawley & Valli, 1999, p. 142). In addition, teachers need to have supportive administration and “have access to adequate funds for materials, outside speakers, substitute teachers, and so on” (Richardson, 2003, p. 401).

In the literature, several types of professional development, such as study groups and networks are associated with reform movements, whereas workshops and conferences are usually linked to traditional professional development (Garet et al., 2001). Garet et al. (2001)
examined the effects of different characteristics of professional development measured by teachers' self-reported increases in knowledge and skills and changes in practice. The study drew from teachers who participated in wide-ranging professional activities, from traditional to more reform-oriented ones. Their results indicate "sustained and intensive professional development is more likely to have an impact... than shorter professional development" (Garet et al., 2001, p. 935). But this result depends not on whether the activity is traditional or reform, but rather, the duration of the professional development. Garet et al. (2001) show that reform activities tended to have higher outcomes only because they were usually longer; when duration was controlled for, traditional and reform activities tended to have the same reported outcomes. The implications for designing high-quality learning suggest that more traditional forms of professional development could be more effective if they were longer.

Builds on Teacher Expertise

Recognizing teachers as the experts they are represents yet another important shift in teacher professional development because teachers are a source of good ideas (Fullan, 2001). Elmore and Burney (1999) report improved district literacy scores in a school district where shared expertise was the norm; teachers and principals engaged in both in and cross school conferences on curriculum and teaching, visited colleagues in other classrooms and in other schools, and planned district-wide curriculum collaboratively. While there is greater consensus that teacher professional development needs to harness the knowledge and skills that teachers bring to the experience (Hawley & Valli, 1999), there is less agreement on the need for an external facilitator because there is not enough conclusive research that suggests it
is essential (Richardson, 2003).

Practical

Teachers need multiple sources of information relevant to implementing new learning (Little, 1993) and learning should include a variety of perspectives (Fullan, 2001). High-quality professional development should also focus on practical classroom applications (Elmore & Burney, 1999) and it should deepen and expand content knowledge (AFT, 2002). Additionally, teachers need access to professional learning that builds on teachers' understanding of best practice in particular disciplines; “although knowing the content is critical, it is not sufficient. Teachers must also know how to get students to understand it” (AFT, 2002, p. 5). To accomplish a strong pedagogical understanding and familiarization with practices, teacher professional development needs to do more than explain a technique; teachers need practice employing the strategy before returning to the classroom (Elmore & Burney, 1999; Holm & Horn, 2003).

Examines Teacher Beliefs and Makes Theory to Practice Connections

Professional development must take into account teachers’ existing beliefs (Andres & Richardson, 1994; Richardson, 2003). “Since beliefs filter knowledge and guide behaviour, significant transformations of teaching practice are unlikely to occur if they are ignored” (Hawley & Valli, 1999, p. 143). Fullan (2001) makes the claim that “changes in beliefs and understanding...are the foundation of achieving lasting reform” (p. 45). But as Hawley and Valli (1999) note, “such beliefs are difficult to change” (p. 143) so “teachers must experience
different types of learning themselves, spend time adapting their instruction, and see positive results in their students” (p. 143).

Teachers need the opportunity to personally make meaning; forming a deep understanding of an innovation minimizes the potential of the change being adopted only on a short-term and/or superficial level (Fullan, 2001). Stigler and Hiebert (1999) report a discrepancy between teachers saying they were familiar with the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics’ (NCTM) Professional Standards for Teaching Mathematics and their actual approach to teaching mathematics. Teachers made superficial changes such as using more manipulatives or real-world problem scenarios but fundamentally did not alter their approach to teaching. Fullan (2001) similarly remarks on this:

Assume that any significant innovation, if it is to result in change, requires individual implementers to work out their own meaning. Significant change involves a certain amount of ambiguity, ambivalence, and uncertainty for the individual about the meaning of change. ... Clarification is likely to come in large part through reflective practice. (p. 108)

Finally, teachers also need opportunities to make connections between theory and practice (Andres & Richardson, 1994) and have access to research to do this (Hawley & Valli, 1999). Before making these connections, McDonald (1986) asserts that teachers need to “...bring theory into their conversation on their own terms” (p. 355), which he believes allows teachers to see themselves as having theory, of having something to offer, of being able to critique. In
sum, effective professional development positions teachers as critical thinkers and agents of change where they are able to accept, modify or reject change.

Part of a Comprehensive Change Process

Professional development needs to occur in a systematic and meaningful way (Little, 1993; Fullan, 1991). Traditional professional development has been criticized for being too fragmented and unfocused (Clark & Florio-Ruane, 2001; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 2001). Much success has been made in reaching goals of improved teacher instruction in school districts with a collegial and collective focus on system wide improvement (Elmore & Burney, 1999). Fullan (2001) cautions reformists against taking on too much at once (Fullan, 1991). Time is also crucial; teachers need time and opportunities to evaluate merits of strategies, and new curriculum (Fullan, 2001; Hawley & Valli, 1999).

Study Groups as a Meaningful Framework

Study groups are associated with reform movements (Garet et al., 2001). A presentation of the study group model and its fit with the characteristics of effective professional development will now be discussed.

Linda Darling-Hammond (1997), a prominent contributor to best practice in teacher learning and professionalism states that “an occupation becomes a profession when it assumes responsibility for developing a shared knowledge base for all of its members and for
transmitting that knowledge through professional education, licensing, and ongoing peer reviews" (p. 298). Models of collaborative inquiry, such as study groups, contribute to the development of a shared knowledge (Florio-Ruane & Raphael, 2001; Knight, 2000), overcome the effects of isolation, connect theory with practice, develop a strong sense of professionalism (Birchak et al., 1998) and access teacher expertise (Richardson, 2003).

Study Group Definition and Organization

Increasing success with collaborative professional development models such as study groups has made a mark on the reform and professional development stage. Broadly speaking, the term study group refers to a framework of professional development where teachers meet regularly to "...converse and to study teaching and learning" (Lefever-Davis, Wilson, Moore, Kent, & Hopkins, 2003, p. 782). Makibbin and Sprague (1991) see study groups as a place for teachers to come together and study the craft of teaching. Sanacore (1993) highlights that study groups are grassroots in order to be personally relevant to teachers. Cramer, Hurst, & Wilson (1996) offer a more thorough definition of a teacher study group:

A teacher study group is a collaborative group organized and sustained by teachers to help them strengthen their professional development in areas of common interest. In these groups, teachers remain in charge of their own independent learning but seek to reach personal goals through interaction with others. Groups focus on collaborative inquiries, such as researching a particular topic or issue, reading and discussing a specific book, investigating a theory, looking into a potential change in curriculum, or...
other commonly agreed purpose. (p. 7)

In sum, study groups share a number of defining characteristics. They are voluntary, regular, collaborative, collegial and supportive, reflective, equitable, link theory with practice, focus on a specific topic of member choice, and operate at a grass-roots level.

Different study groups will organize themselves differently but overall, study groups have several features in common. The most common frequency of meetings seems to be a bimonthly or monthly meeting that lasts approximately an hour to an hour and a half (Birchak et al., 1998; Makibbin & Sprague, 1991). There is less agreement on the ideal group size. Members of the study groups referenced in Birchak et al. (1998) recommend 10 to 20 members whereas Makibbin and Sprague (1991) are more comfortable with a broad range of 5 to 25 members. The challenge for a large group is that it becomes more difficult to ensure that everyone has equal opportunity to share (Birchak et al., 1998). Birchak et al. (1998) also note that the format of the meetings must also be structured to balance individual and collective needs. This can be a challenging process because some members will prefer to share lessons and classroom anecdotes while other members will be more interested in discussing theory. Structuring the meetings so that time is allocated to each, advise Birchak et al. (1998), will help avoid this problem. Meetings should conclude with a brief discussion of goals for the next meeting (Birchak et al., 1998; Makibbin & Sprague, 1991).

Characteristics and Benefits of Study Groups

Study groups that have met with success (Birchak et al., 1998; Cowan & Capers, 2000;
Florio-Ruane & Raphael, 2001; McDonald, 1986) have been voluntary and ongoing, teacher led, collaborative and collegial, and theoretical. Study groups are often school-based but membership is by no means restricted to one school. In fact, technological advances such as the internet are making it easier for members to connect when in-person contact is not possible (Florio-Ruane & Raphael, 2001).

Voluntary, Ongoing, and Cohesive

As professionals, teachers are required to participate in professional development but a fundamental component of the study group is voluntary attendance (Birchak et al., 1998; Lefever-Davis et al., 2003; Makibbin & Sprague, 1991; Sanacore, 1993). Professional development is more successful if teachers believe in what they are involved in (Birchak et al., 1998).

In addition to being voluntary, a long-term commitment is also necessary to the success of a study group. There are several reasons for this. First, deep engagement and sustained reflection, precursors to changes in practice and beliefs, require regular and ongoing opportunities to talk about and reflect on educational practices and theories (Andres & Richardson, 1994; Fullan, 2001). Second, sharing ideas and talking about belief systems requires a trusting environment and the establishment of a safe and trusting atmosphere takes time (Fullan, 2001; Hawley & Valli, 1999). In sum, personal development takes effort, time, and opportunity - months, even years for durable, sustainable change (Baird, 1992).
Finally, a criticism of traditional professional development is that it is ad hoc, discontinuous, and unconnected (Clark & Florio-Ruane, 2001; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 2001). Attempts to implement and learn too many things at once are not effective (Andres & Richardson, 1994; Fullan, 2001). Study groups have the fortunate benefit of providing ongoing focus and connectedness.

Active Teacher Involvement

The study group looks to all of its members to play a contributing role in the group’s functioning. It may be necessary at the outset for the facilitator to take on a greater burden of the responsibility but members are gradually expected to take on leadership roles (Fullan, 2001). For example, in a university course study group (Lefever-Davis et al., 2003) it was necessary in the beginning for the facilitator, who was the course instructor, to take a more direct role. But as the group progressed and gained in confidence the teacher-participants began naturally to assume more ownership in the process. Another successful option is to have a new teacher volunteer to facilitate each meeting (Birchak et al., 1998). This does not preclude the involvement of a facilitator but it does mean the facilitator participates more as member than expert (Birchak et al., 1998).

It is important in a study group setting that teachers begin to realize their own level of expertise and see that as a resource (Richardson, 2003) and move away from the traditional trappings of the external expert as knowing what is best for individual teachers and schools (Fullan, 2001).
Collaborative and Collegial

Teachers in an inquiry-based model of professional development, like that of a study group, gather to discuss common interests and goals (Birchak et al., 1998) where meaning is co-constructed through the exchange of ideas in a social setting (Richardson, 2003). Teachers, however, lead busy lives and they are constantly up against a lack of information, access, time, and energy, and this leaves little room for collaboration (Birchak et al., 1998; Fullan, 2001). Furthermore, the cellular design of schools (Fullan, 2001; McDonald, 1986) and a broader societal culture of individualism (Richardson, 2003) contribute to a working environment that is physically, intellectually, and psychologically, isolating. The study group helps to overcome these negative effects of isolation and bring relief to teachers as they realize that other colleagues share similar joys and frustrations (McDonald, 1986).

One of the most obvious benefits of learning collaboratively is the learning that results from interacting with colleagues. According to the learning theory of constructivism, human knowledge is constructed individually and within social communities (Richardson, 2003). Benjamin Franklin, who participated in a business study group of young businessmen, describes the benefits of people coming together. He states “individuals associated can do more for society, and themselves, than they can in isolation” (cited in Makibbin and Sprague, 1991, p. 4). Likewise, Grimmett and Crehan (1992) state “the structures of collaborative group-work enable teachers to attempt curricular-instructional innovations that they would probably not have tried as individuals” (p. 56). Another advantage of the collaborative
process in a study group is that teachers are able to share classroom stories, lesson plans, and strategies that have immediate transfer to practice (Birchak et al., 1998).

The development of collegial relationships in a trusting and supportive atmosphere is not only an attractive feature of study groups but it is also important to the study group’s success. Study groups need to build in time for sharing the ups and downs of teaching as this helps members get to know one another thus creating a community of learners who will be willing to engage in critical reflection (Birchak et al., 1998). McDonald (1986), like Birchak et al (1998) also found that teachers benefited from having a safe place to share their stories and to begin to establish a strong teacher advocacy voice. He reports that his high school study group had the major benefit of providing a safe place for teachers to support each other in times of change and to provide the time to talk to one another. Members found it a relief to learn that other teachers shared similar joys and frustrations and appreciated the opportunity to share them.

Examine Beliefs and Connect Theory with Practice

Richardson (2003) reports that teachers who engaged in a collaborative process of inquiry over a sustained period of time changed their beliefs and practice. Teaching, according to Kennedy (1999) is anything but a self-evident job. But the complexity and ambiguity of the profession can be examined through dialogue, argues McDonald (1986), as teachers are able to examine the theory behind the instructional decisions made on a daily basis. Although most teachers do not regard themselves as theorists, teacher behaviour is guided by personal belief
systems, even if only at a tacit level (McDonald, 1986). And because the difficulty for most teachers is finding the time to engage in meaningful conversation (Birchak et al.; 1998; Fullan, 2001), many teachers are unlikely to examine critically why they do what they do.

In a study group, teachers regularly examine their beliefs and share insights in a trusting and supportive environment (Birchak et al., 1998; Florio-Ruane & Raphael, 2001; Lefever-Davis et al., 2003). Birchak et al. (1998) state:

Study groups cannot only be places to exchange practical ideas and activities. Without also discussing the “big ideas” that underlie these activities, we found that the activities were of little use, and we quickly tired of the group. (p. 17)

At the same as time teachers are busy examining their beliefs, study groups also provide opportunities for teachers to systematically address common problems (Sanacore, 1993) by accessing relevant research to supplement the inquiry (Richardson, 2003). Teacher study groups have the benefit of providing opportunities to make connections between theory and practice (Birchak et al., 1998) to real-life classroom situations (Lefever-Davis et al., 2003). Personal teaching anecdotes can also be used to draw out and discuss theoretical applications (McDonald, 1986).

McDonald (1986) advocates a further benefit, one not widely mentioned in the literature, and that is the opportunity study groups provide for teachers to take a more prominent role in policy making. Teachers, he argues, need to recognize themselves as theorists and share their
knowledge on a more public level. McDonald (1986) would therefore be pleased that Florio-Ruane and Raphael (2001) report that teachers in their study group experienced increased confidence in expressing ideas, an increased desire to learn and interestingly, a shift in identity - they started to see themselves as theorists.

**Teacher Motivation and Reward**

Study groups have also been shown to decrease teacher isolation and increase commitment to change and professional development (Cowan & Capers, 2000). Rosenholtz (1991) argues that isolation and uncertainty are associated with schools with little collaboration, thus less likely to try new things and better themselves because certainty and commitment feed on one another, resulting in increased motivation. Collaboration in a study group can serve as an antidote to these negative effects of isolation.

Participating in a study group also has the benefit of inspiring and invigorating teachers whose teaching reality often leaves them short on time and energy. Motivation is increased when teachers' work together to develop shared understanding and common moral and intellectual commitments (Fullan, 2001). Fullan (2001) writes:

> Meaning fuels motivation; know-how feeds on itself to produce ongoing problem-solving. Their opposites – confusion, overload, and low sense of self-efficacy – deplete energy at the very time that it is sorely needed. (p. 48)

A personal example of this can be found in an anecdote made by Barnes (1992) when he shares his experience as a member of the group LATE (London Association of the Teaching
If I ask myself why I was willing to travel after a day's hard work in school to spend evenings talking, listening, planning or writing, my answers would have to include the phrase 'intellectual excitement'. (p. 11)

Professional and Personal Growth

Teachers who participate in study groups can experience an increased sense of professionalism and value for self and others (Birchak et al., 1998) Like that of Birchak et al. (1998), Florio-Ruane and Raphael's (2001) research on study groups also found that teachers felt an increased sense of agency and the outcome of this changed sense of professionalism led to the participants' becoming more professionally active outside the group; teachers created book clubs in their own schools and presented curriculum to other teachers in their schools and at the state and national level. Teachers pursuing professional goals in a study group setting are actively involved in the learning process and this has the added beneficial outcome of increasing teacher leadership. There are opportunities to develop leadership skills by taking on roles such as teacher facilitator, note taker, and timekeeper (Birchak et al, 1998). Finally, members of a study group have the added benefit selecting topics and a format that are based on their needs versus the needs of external administrative or institutional needs (Lefever-Davis et al., 2003).

Practical

Other reported positive benefits to a study group are a professional experience that is
focused on the needs of the students and teachers and the opportunity to build a professional repertoire of lessons and strategies (Lefever-Davis et al., 2003).

Student Achievement

Ultimately the major reason for any educational reform is to see improvements in student achievement. Research indicates increased student achievement at schools where collaborative professional models like study groups are in place (Makibbin & Sprague, 1991; Richardson, 2003). Gains in student achievement depend on the extent in which teachers master and implement new strategies (Joyce et al., 1989).

Four Examples of Study Groups From the Literature

Much of the information provided in this literature review is drawn from four examples of existing study groups. The four study groups are fundamentally collaborative and collegial inquiry models of teacher learning, but they differ in purpose, composition, and organization. Probably the most extensive guide to initiating and sustaining a teacher study group is the book *Teacher Study Groups: Building Community through Dialogue and Reflection* written by Birchak et al. (1998). The book is more practical than it is theoretical, and it is clearly laid out and easy to read. It is an honest yet professional portrayal of the experiences of two elementary study groups over several years. The book describes reasons for starting a study group, such as committing to reflection and dialogue on a long-term basis, types of study groups, organization and facilitation of study groups, and finally issues faced by study
groups. Data were collected from member interviews and transcripts were collected from several years of study group meetings. They found that voluntary attendance was necessary to the success of the group and in addition to the sharing of ideas, members highly valued opportunities to discuss the “big ideas” that underlie the practical strategies. Finally, the group changed membership at different times, once in particular as a response to becoming too big.

A second study that provides strong evidence for the use of study groups as a professional framework is the work done by Florio-Ruane and Raphael (2001). In this three-year study, relying on ethnographic and sociolinguistic methodology, two study groups were followed, one a master’s course for teachers on culture, literature and autobiography, and a second literacy group composed of female volunteers from the initial master’s class. Participant’s views on their learning and professional growth were examined. Data were documented in five different ways: the instructor kept a journal, field notes were taken immediately after each session, all book talks were audio taped, teachers’ written texts were collected and analyzed, and all participants were interviewed. Florio-Ruane and Raphael (2001) report increased professional agency and personal intellectual growth in study group members; members returned to schools more active as leaders and came to regard themselves as “thinkers”. They also found that study group members reported becoming more confident when expressing ideas, more motivated to learn, more passionate toward literature, and more open to alternative future directions as teachers and individuals.
A third example referenced throughout this review is a study group described by McDonald (1986). McDonald (1986) details a secondary study group’s evolution from collegiality as an end in itself, to a group of teachers confident in their practice and adopting the new identity of theorist. The group consisted of a group of both male and female teachers from different secondary schools who met on a regular basis to discuss problems, themes, and paradoxes that are part of the teaching world. A fourth example, a long-term study conducted by Joyce et al. (1989) involving several schools in Richmond County Georgia, demonstrates success using school-based study groups to help teachers implement new teaching strategies and improve student achievement. The project was district sponsored and relied on two external consultants. Joyce et al. (1989) were interested in measuring the “...changes in the workplace, the implementation of the models of teaching, and effects on students” (p. 73). They report that the process of overcoming norms of isolation were challenging and complex; collaborative success required both time and strong leadership to overcome resistance and uncertainty. Joyce et al. (1989) also report decreased disciplinary referrals and increased student achievement but student achievement was tied to the skill of the teacher. Teachers who had mastered the new strategy a deep level had higher student outcomes than teachers who taught at a “mechanical” level.

Gaps in the Research

Teacher Voice

Reviewing the literature on teacher professional development reveals and study groups
reveals that teachers are not being asked directly what matters to them in a professional development setting. In both Birchak et al. (1998) and McDonald (1986), teachers author publications about their experiences, but none of the literature reviewed here explicitly set out to ask teachers what was meaningful to them and why. My study is designed like this because as a teacher, I find it meaningful to learn about what other teachers think; I feel more connected to research when it is authored by a teacher and/or directly asks teachers for their input.

Dissatisfied Members

The literature review did not mention member dissatisfaction with the study group experience. Thus, my study will ask six on-leave members whether their year off relates to dissatisfaction with the study group.

Demographic Differences

The research reviewed here did not overtly indicate any differences between gender, elementary and secondary teachers, or teachers with varying levels of experience. There were some exceptions. First, Florio-Ruane and Raphael (2001) noticed that their all-female study group modelled conversational patterns typically demonstrated in research by other middle-class, Caucasian, American women. Lortie (2002) also points out possible gender differences in reasons for entering the teaching profession, such as that men, more so than women, may feel a larger material sacrifice for choosing teaching over another career like business. A difference in teaching experience was also reported in Lortie (2002): even though teachers of
all levels of experience reported that they preferred other teachers as their main source of ideas, beginning teachers were even more likely to prefer help from colleagues closest in rank, versus administration. According to Lortie (2002), elementary and secondary teachers differ in the ways they look for rewards from students. Elementary teachers are more likely to derive great satisfaction from a “striking success with one student” (Lortie, 2002, p. 121), whereas secondary teachers are less trustworthy of current students’ feedback, and take more pride in graduated students who return to offer thanks and appreciation. The current study will compare values in professional development between the three demographic categories - gender, grade level, and teaching experience – to determine if differences exist.

The Current Study

The purpose of my study is to explore what teachers perceive as valuable in a professional development experience. In doing so, this research aims to add to an existing literature of best practice in teacher professional development. One of the major strengths of Birchak et al. (1998) is that it is a book written by teachers for teachers. McDonald (1986) encourages teachers to take an active role in educational policy matters. My intention is to represent teachers’ voices concerning their professional development options in a political climate where the rhetoric of accountability has the ear of the public. Furthermore, the data collected from research need to be valuable to those who participate in it. By investigating teachers’ beliefs about what makes their study group effective, my goal is to complement the existing reflection and feedback cycle that already occurs in the teacher study group taking part in this
research. A summary of the data is intended to help facilitate the group’s goal-setting for the following school year.

Also to be explored in this study are the voices of members who no longer attend the study group. Addressing this gap in the research will provide insight into why the study group experience is not a good fit for everyone. This may provide helpful information to schools where some teachers are resisting joining a school-based study group.

Conclusion

While the teacher workplace can be painted as rather gloomy – images of teachers isolated by physical and psychological barriers, learning by trial and error, uncertain how to best assess and teach their students, with their only positive feedback coming from irregular and unpredictable student success (Lortie, 2002; Rosenholtz, 1991) – there are also examples of schools with high degrees of collaboration and teacher certainty (Elmore & Burney, 1999), and arguments favouring some degree of individualism and individuality in schools (Hargreaves, 1994; Richardson, 2003). Increased understanding of teachers’ subjective realities (Fullan, 2001) is moving professional development away from professional activities that involve “routine application of familiar strategies and knowledge and toward a conception of practice rooted in ongoing inquiry” (Carroll, 2001, p. 3) and toward meaningful professional engagement that is an ongoing, shared, supportive, theoretical, “hands-on”, practical, and student driven experience (Hawley & Valli, 1999), and it is rooted in the best
available research (The American Federation of Teachers, 2002).

When teachers need to focus on a specific area of professional development, study groups provide an alternative to the “one size fits all” model of delivery (Sanacore, 1993). The study group provides teachers with opportunities to examine different theories and perspectives (Holm & Horn, 2003) and access the inherent knowledge existing within a school, department, or district (Knight, 2002) in a supportive (Le Fevre & Richardson, 2002) and equitable (Sanacore, 1993) environment. The social nature of learning within these groups where meaning is co-constructed is particularly empowering for many teachers (Carroll, 2001).

The purpose of my study is to investigate the value teachers place on the characteristics of both traditional and effective professional development. In doing so I hope to add to an existing literature on best practice in teacher professional development and assist my study group with its evaluation process.
III: Methodology

The research design and methodology used in this study will be presented in this chapter. The chapter will also explain how the questionnaire and interview questions were developed, validated, and piloted. The data analysis procedure used will also be outlined.

Sample

This study relied on two sample groups for its data: sample one, the study group, and sample two, the comparison group. For the remainder of this chapter, the groups will be referenced by their names (e.g., study group and comparison group) and not by their sample group number.

First, questionnaires were given to 35 members of a teacher study group in the Lower Mainland of Vancouver, British Columbia. This group was selected because of the relationship between the researchers and the members – both the principal and co-investigators were members of the group at the time of the survey. Neither myself nor the co-investigator, my advisor, Dr. Joe Belanger, was surveyed. This group was comprised of 35 members: 26 teachers who taught at the elementary level, including four administrators; eight secondary teachers; and the facilitator of the group. Of the 35 members, seven members were considered on-leave for the year but because they remained in touch on the e-mail contact list and had intentions of returning to the group the following year, they were
included in the survey. Membership in this study group represented 17 of the district’s 39 elementary schools, and 4 of the 11 secondary schools.

Surveys were distributed to 25 teachers who qualified for the comparison group. To reflect the membership of the study group, comparison group teachers were elementary or secondary teachers who taught English or Language Arts. These teachers also taught in the same school district as their study group counterparts.

Permission to contact and use all participants was received by UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Appendix G), the School Board (Appendix H), and the individual teachers.

Timeline for Collecting Data

The Survey

Members of the study group were introduced to the research project at their regularly scheduled meeting in April 2004. A cover letter (Appendix A) and the survey (Appendix B) were given to all attending members in self-addressed, stamped envelopes to be returned to the co-investigator should they chose to participate. Members were asked to complete the questionnaire within two weeks.

The seven individuals who were not actively attending meetings, but had attended in the past, were sent a cover letter (Appendix C) explaining the study’s purpose and provided with a questionnaire (Appendix D) and self-addressed, stamped envelope to return anonymously if
they should choose to participate. Over the course of a month and a half, four reminders were sent out to the group using the study group's email contact list, two before the return deadline and two after because response rate at that time was only 50 percent. It was also a busy time for teachers and so members did not mind the additional reminders as many participants wrote on the survey that they had simply forgotten. Twenty-six, or 74 percent of the 35 questionnaires were returned.

Accessing the second sample group, the comparison group, was difficult. The original intent was to survey four elementary and two secondary schools, randomly selected from all schools that did not have members attending the study group. Despite several efforts to contact administrators and get approval to approach English teachers in their schools, it was not possible to contact potential participants this way. The one exception, however, was one elementary school administrator who was willing to distribute and collect surveys to teachers in his school. Six surveys were received from this school. The remaining 19 comparison surveys (Appendices E and F) were distributed by three study group members to elementary and secondary teachers of English or language arts in the district. These three contacts either gave the surveys to teachers in their school or to teachers they came into contact with through their work as consultants in the district. In total, 19 of the 25, or 76 percent of the comparison questionnaires were returned. Within the comparison group, 13, or 68 percent of teachers answered yes to the question that asked them if they already participate in a study group. This result was unexpected for a comparison group but it is likely due to the way the surveys were distributed; teachers given a survey while attending a workshop might be more likely to attend a study group than a teacher randomly selected in an elementary or high school.
The Interview

At the meeting in May 2004, members were given the chance to volunteer to participate in a follow-up interview. Members were also given a consent form (Appendix I) to complete if they wanted to volunteer to participate in a follow-up interview to the survey. To maintain confidentiality, members dropped the form, either blank or completed, into a box on their way out of the meeting.

Sixteen members, plus the facilitator of the study group, volunteered for an interview. Time and resources restricted the number of interviews to seven teacher members plus the facilitator of the group. The ratio of elementary to secondary members in the group was 26 to 8. In order for the interview to reflect this ratio, the elementary volunteers were separated from the secondary volunteer forms and five names were drawn from the elementary pile and two from the secondary pile. Interviewees were contacted by the email and the interviews took place in local schools and in some cases coffee shops, in late May and early June of 2004. On average each interview lasted one hour.

Questionnaire and Interview Development

Both open-ended and rating scale questions were used in the surveys (Appendices B, D, and F) and only open-ended questions in the interviews (Appendix J). The survey was three single-sided pages in length. Twenty-six likert-type rating scales provided information on the degree of importance each participant placed on each item (Thomas, 1999). Participants were asked to rate the importance of each item on a five-point scale, five being a high
priority, and one being a low priority. Study group members were additionally asked to rate the extent to which the characteristic existed in the study group. After rating each individual item, participants were then asked to rank their top five items in order of priority to provide data on relative standing between the items (Thomas, 1999). In other words, respondents may have rated two characteristics at a four on the likert scale, but if they had to pick their top five, they may have decided on one over the other.

The second part of the survey was comprised of five short answer questions in order to allow participants the opportunity to use their own words to answer the questions and to account for any unanticipated comments (Fink, 1995). For these same reasons interviews were conducted to elaborate on the answers provided in the original questionnaire. Two coding methods were used to interpret the data. First, questions one, two, and three on the study group survey, and question one on the comparison group survey, were methodically coded, themed, and then categorized according to methods outlined in Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Merriam (1998). The remaining questions: question five on the study group survey and questions two, three, and four on the comparison group survey, were used to test and refine the categories generated in the first round of coding. In other words, I looked for items that both confirmed and disconfirmed the developed categories. When items did not fit nicely into a pre-established category, a new category was created. Interview data were coded using this second method. The decision to change coding strategies for some questions was done because the initial code had successfully produced categories that transferred to the other questions.
Short answer questions and interview data were transcribed and anonymous identifications were attached to each survey. Each survey was given a number (e.g. ID 12 was survey 12) and each of the interviewees was assigned a pseudonym (Erica, Kate, Ann, Kelly, Karla, Joey, and Noah). This way all the data remained confidential. In order to track the data effectively as it was coded, each line in the short answer questions was numbered. For example, “ID 1: Q1, 3-4” refers to survey one, question number one, lines three and four, and these data were recorded in Excel tables. The pseudonyms listed above are used to identify all quoted interviewee data in Chapter IV. Thus, if quoted material is anonymous it has been taken from the survey short-answer questions.

Survey Rating Scales

Working from my research questions, I developed nine topics and from each of these topics, the questions that comprised the survey (Thomas, 1999). The questionnaire was designed based on themes from reading literature on teacher professional development and professional learning communities, such as study groups, because a literature review failed to find survey questions that examined what teachers valued in a professional development experience. The topics and their corresponding questions are outlined below.

The major themes identified in the literature review phase of this study that have informed the questions are: learning culture, structure, choice, relevance, collaboration, theory to practice, practical support, reflection and goal setting, and leadership. These topic names were used only in the development of the survey; new categories were developed for the
Table 1

Topics and the Corresponding Survey Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Number of Questions</th>
<th>Corresponding Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10, 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16, 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21, 22, 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegial &amp; Collaborative</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15, 18, 23, 1, 4, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory &amp; practice &amp; Beliefs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical support</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6, 9, 12, 14, 24, 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection &amp; Goal Setting</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expertise</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13, 19, 20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

analysis. Table 1 outlines the survey questions that correspond to the themes in the literature review.

The same stem was used with all 26 questions: *I value professional development that*… so, only the endings for each question are listed below. Research that supports the inclusion of the question in the survey is also presented.

**Structure**

Teachers value ongoing professional development (Garet et al., 2001). This is because short-term professional development is fragmented and unfocused (Dufour & Eaker, 1998). Andres and Richardson (1994) and Fullan (2001) similarly argue that lasting and meaningful change requires regular and ongoing opportunities to allow teachers to talk and reflect on educational practices and theories. I wanted to know how important it was to the participants in the study group that they had the opportunity to be involved in focused and ongoing learning, and to find out whether the comparison group differed in this. To assess the
importance survey participants placed on the commitment level of professional development experience, the following two questions were asked.

10. Involves a short-term commitment of one or two sessions.

11. Is ongoing and involves a long-term commitment (i.e., three or more sessions, or meeting on a regular basis).

Choice

Participation in a study group must be voluntary (Birchak et al., 1998; Lefever-Davis et al., 2003; Makibbin & Sprague, 1991; Sanacore, 1993) because professional development is more meaningful when teachers believe in what they are involved in (Birchak et al., 1998). Question 17 was included because in the school district where the study group functions, each school is annually responsible for selecting and measuring school goals. Two opposite questions were asked to determine if one was more important to respondents: the opportunity to participate in self-directed or school-directed professional development.

16. Is self-directed, allowing me to choose professional development that is meaningful to me.

17. Is school-directed, allowing staffs to work on meeting school goals.

Relevance

Study groups are meaningful to their participants because the learning is relevant to their work in the classroom (Lefever-Davis et al., 1999). Birchak et al. (1998) similarly state that the opportunity to connect individual and school (i.e., classroom) needs is one of many benefits to a study group. Question 22 was included to determine whether teachers value
professional development that is relevant to their practice. Sharing between teachers occurs away from the classroom; teachers after exchanging ‘tricks of the trade’ return to their individual classrooms to implement and evaluate a new idea on their own (Lortie, 2002). Teacher learning is most effective, therefore, when it is part of teachers’ regular workday (AFT, 2002; Joyce et al., 1989).

21. Provides me with instructional strategies and lesson plans that I can use in my classroom.

22. Has direct bearing on my practice.

26. Is integrated into daily life at school.

Collegial and Collaborative

Building in opportunities, such as sharing the ups and downs of teaching, helps to create a collegial learning community in which members will feel safe to engage in critical reflection (Birchak et al., 1998). Study groups are by their definition collaborative; Cramer, Hurst, and Wilson (1996) define a study group as a collaborative group organized and sustained by teachers to help them strengthen their professional development in areas of common interest. Study groups help to overcome isolation (Fullan, 2001) and individualism (Richardson, 2003) and allow teachers to find time to work together (Birchak et al., 1998). To determine values toward aspects of collegiality and collaboration, the following six questions were asked:

15. Fosters a trusting and supportive learning environment.

18. Provides teachers with the opportunity build collegial relationships.

23. Brings together educators who share a common interest or problem.
1. Engages teachers in sharing classroom anecdotes, lesson plans, and strategies.

4. Provides the chance to learn collaboratively with other teachers, building off of and contributing to the knowledge of others.

5. Provides me with the chance to pursue my professional goals by myself.

Linking Theory to Practice and Examining Beliefs

"Study groups cannot only be places to exchange practical ideas and activities. Without also discussing the 'big ideas' that underlie these activities, we found that the activities were of little use, and we quickly tired of the group," (Birchak et al., 1998, p.17). Furthermore, Fullan, (2001) and Andres & Richardson, (1994) both argue that lasting change requires teachers to examine beliefs because beliefs influence classroom behaviour. Two questions were asked to determine the importance the participants placed on the different types of exchanges.

2. Engages teachers in critically examining beliefs about teaching and learning.

3. Provides the opportunity to make connections between theory and practice.

Practical Support

Florio-Ruane and Raphael (2001) point out the paradox of asking teachers to teach in ways they have not been taught themselves. Similarly, when content and learning tasks are novel or particularly complex, professional development opportunities should incorporate well-rehearsed or familiar instructional strategies (Hawley and Valli, 1999, p. 136). Additionally, "teacher efficacy is enhanced when teachers have opportunities to see new strategies modeled, practice them, engage in peer coaching, acclimate students to new ways of
learning, and use new teaching and learning strategies regularly and appropriately,” (Hawley & Valli, 1999, p. 130). Some teachers may need support to implement new strategies from coaches and outside experts (Little & McLaughlin, 1993).

Question 24 was developed after the pilot study revealed that respondents highly favoured items such as theory-practice connections and examining beliefs. Up until the pilot study, the research I reviewed had ignored the importance of content knowledge but the results of the pilot study prompted me to examine research such as Garet et al. (2001) that provides evidence for professional development which focuses on academic subject knowledge. Unlike opportunities to examine theoretical foundations of an educational practice, the following questions address the type of support that would allow teachers to implement strategies and content in their classrooms.

6. Provides me with the opportunity to learn in ways I’m expected to teach.

9. Provides hands-on support in the classroom to implement new curriculum and/or strategies.

12. Trains teachers in new curriculum and teaching strategies.

14. Provides teachers with the chance to observe colleagues teaching.

24. Focuses on deepening my subject-matter content knowledge.

25. Provides teachers the opportunity to examine and review student work.

Reflection and Goal Setting

Andres & Richardson (1994), Fullan (2001), and Hawley and Valli (1999) claim that effective professional development relies on teachers’ developing reflective capacities. Once
a teacher study group has identified a broad topic, teachers can then set their own related personalized goals (Lefever-Davis et al., 2003).

7. Provides me with the opportunity to reflect on my practice.

8. Provides me the opportunity to set professional goals.

In addition, but not reflected in the questionnaire, are the need for goals to address the gaps between goals for student performance and student achievement (AFT, 2002; Hawley & Valli, 1999).

Expertise

Several professional development models are shifting toward a competency-based approach that relies on less external experts and more on depending on the knowledge and skills teachers bring to the experience (Hawley & Valli, 1999). External experts are often not the best candidates to determine what is best for teachers and schools (Fullan, 2001). For this shift in responsibility to happen, Richardson (2003) notes, teachers need to view themselves as having expertise. Active learning, a characteristic of effective professional development, is promoted when teachers have opportunities to lead discussions or engage in written work (Garet et al., 2001).

19. Recognizes and capitalizes on teachers' professional knowledge and skills

13. Provides teachers with the opportunity to give presentations, lead discussions, and/or produce written work.

20. Involves an expert presentation on educational topics, theory, and instructional strategies.
Survey Open-ended Questions

Members of the study group were asked five open-ended questions on the survey:

1. In general, what do you value the most in a professional development experience?
2. What do you specifically value about participating in the study group?
3. How have you benefited professionally and/or personally from your participation in the study group?
4. In your opinion, what should be the role of the facilitator in a study group?
5. What advice would you give to future study groups to assist them in creating a meaningful professional development experience?

Questions one and two were included to supplement the data from the rating scales and they both directly related to the research questions. The benefits to participating in a learning community are well documented (see Birchak et al., 1998; Florio-Ruane & Raphael, 2001; Knight, 2002). Question three was asked because in addition to determining what these teachers valued in a professional development experience, I was also interested in knowing what benefits, if any, members felt they had gained. Question five was asked to elicit from members the factors they perceived contributed to the success of a study group.

Question four was originally asked to determine whether members held more traditional or conventional views on the role of the facilitator within a study group. Did teachers agree that expertise should be harnessed within a learning community, and not rest just within the hands of an external expert (Fullan, 2001)? These data were not analyzed due to reasons previously
given in the Introduction; the goal of the study was to determine what teachers valued, not evaluate the current facilitator of the group.

The six study group members who were on-leave during the time of the study were given the same questions with the exception of number four, the facilitator question. Instead they were asked:

5. If you are not currently attending group meetings would you please indicate whether this is due to personal circumstances ____ or the result of the group not meeting your needs ____ . If the later, would you please elaborate.

On-leave members were asked this question because I was interested in knowing if their absence was connected to the group not meeting their needs. In an informal conversation with the group’s facilitator, I learned of a member who left the first year because she had come to the meetings expecting more of a traditional workshop, than a collaborative exchange of ideas. My literature review did not mention any members who were dissatisfied with the study group experience, only those who said positive things. Thus, I was interested whether there was something the six on-leave members valued in professional development setting that the group might not be providing.

The comparison group survey, like the study group survey, started with the same question asking what respondents value in professional development. This was done to allow for some comparisons between the groups. Because the comparison group participants did not take part in the study group I investigated, the second and third questions were different for them:
2. Please describe the most valuable professional development experience you have participated in.

3. How did you benefit from your participation in that experience (refer to question two)?

Questions two and three were aimed at revealing what type professional development activities the comparison group participants found valuable. Question four asked these participants to comment on whether they would be interested in participating in a study group and why or why not. The final question asked them to describe the role of the facilitator in a study group. The data from this question were not used as they did not fit with the research questions.

Interview Open-ended Questions

The teacher interview was made up of 15 questions, many of them extensions of the questionnaire. The questions and the links to research are provided below. Interview questions one and two were used to expand on the information from questions one and two in the open-ended section of the original survey.

1. In general, what do you value the most in a professional development experience?

2. a) What did you value about participating in the study group?

Parts b and c question two were asked to ensure that interviewees specifically addressed the topics of sharing a common interest and learning collaboratively. A study group is a
collaborative group that is organized and fueled by teachers who come together to develop an area of common interest (Cramer, Hurst, & Wilson, 1996).

b) How important was it to you in this study group that other teachers shared a common interest?

2.c) What was important to you about having the opportunity to learn collaboratively and talk with the other teachers?

Number three was asked to expand on the rating scales used in Part One of the survey where study group members were asked to rate the extent to which they perceived a professional development item, for example, regular, long-term commitment, existed in the group.

3) Describe how SSWN did or did not meet your more general values of professional development that you described in question number one.

Despite the evidence that collaborative cultures lead to school improvement and teacher learning, most schools are isolating places to work (Hawley & Valli, 1999). Teacher isolation is source of dissatisfaction among teachers (Lortie, 2002). I was interested in knowing the reasons teachers joined the group and if the need to seek out collaboration and collegiality were prominent among their reasons. Furthermore, I wanted to know what sustained their commitment in order to assist the group in maintaining its membership.

4. Why did you join the SSWN study group?

5. What sustains your commitment to the group?
There are many benefits to participating in a learning community, including increased professional agency (Birchak et al., 1998; Florio-Ruane & Raphael, 2001), and changes in beliefs (Lefever-Davis et al., 2003) and practice (Makibbin & Sprague, 1991). Question six was an extension of the short answer question in the survey and questions seven, eight and nine were asked specifically in order to determine if teachers experienced these outcomes as a result of participating in the study group.

6. a) How have you benefited from your participation in SSWN?
   b) Beyond the participants in the group, who benefits from your study group?
7. In what ways do you think your participation in SSWN has changed your teaching practice?
8. In what ways has your participation in the study group influenced your philosophy about teaching writing?
9. a) Have you become involved in other professional development activities as a result of this group? If yes, please describe them.
   b) What is it about the study group that influenced your decision to become involved in other activities?

Facilitators have varying roles (Lefever & Richardson, 2002); number ten was asked to determine in more detail than the survey question might provide what members perceived to be the role of facilitator. Again, these data were not analyzed.

10. a) What, in your opinion, should be the role of the facilitator in a study group?
    10b) Describe the difference, if any, between what you thought a facilitator would do in a study group and what you experienced.
Collegiality is an integral part of and an added benefit to participating in a learning community (Birchak et al., 1998; Makibbin & Sprague, 1991). Collegiality grows in a group where sharing occurs (Birchak et al., 1998).

11. a) How collegial did you feel toward others in the study group?

11b) What factors played a role in this?

Study groups are a compliment, not a replacement, for other types of professional development (Sanacore, 1993). Questions 12 and 13 were asked to determine what professional development interviewees had been involved with and to better understand how those activities compared to the study group experience.

12. Compare your experience in the study group with other types of professional development you have been involved with.

13. Would you recommend attending a study group to other teachers? Why or why not?

Question 14 was asked to determine what characteristics of a study group were effective.

14. What advice would you give to future study groups to assist them in creating a meaningful professional development experience?

Finally, question 15 was asked to provide opportunity for additional comments.

15. Would you like to make any final comments?
Validation and Piloting

The questionnaire and interview questions were given to four school district administrators to be validated. Validators were provided with a background of the study and the research questions, and then asked to critically examine the questions for clarity, redundancy, answerability, gaps, and relevance to the research questions. Validators were also asked for feedback on the structure of the survey, specifically, the length and type of questions. Feedback from the validation process resulted in editing the wording of some questions to improve clarity or making a closed question into an open-ended one. One validator commented that some questions required a lot of “think time” and that I would need to accommodate for that, especially in the interviews. It was also suggested that some of the questions were the same question, just worded differently; these questions were either changed or removed.

After the validation process, the surveys were piloted by five Lower Mainland teachers who were taking the same graduate level education class. They were similarly asked to look for any confusing questions, determine whether assumptions were needed in order to answer a question, and to suggest any other comments or concerns they had about the survey. One teacher who piloted the survey commented that he would have felt bad rating any of the rating scales low. This was revealing because the teachers scored almost all of the items at a three or higher. Additional questions were added to balance this bias to higher ratings. For example, to complement a question that asked people to rate the importance of collaboration,
a question asking participants to rate the opportunity to work by themselves was added. Consequently the number of rating scale questions increased from 15 to 26.

I also examined the piloted surveys to determine whether my instructions and/or questions had been clear enough, based on the types of answers provided. The instructions were followed accurately, but one volunteer failed to answer one question that had two parts to it. That question was subsequently split into two separate questions.

Two other teacher colleagues volunteered to pilot the interview questions and a facilitator in the health care system agreed to pilot the facilitator interview. Changes were later made to the wording of questions in order to improve clarity and fluency.

Data Analysis

Creating Independent Groupings

The high number of rating scale items coupled with a small sample size (N=45) made working with the 26 likert-scale items less manageable. To simplify the analysis process, a number of correlated variables were clustered into six more manageable independent groupings. Initially, SPSS 11, a statistical software program for the social sciences, was used to generate factors and although some of the categories made sense, other groupings were conceptually incongruent. The incongruity, plus the small sample size, made a factor analysis on SPSS less reliable (Hallet, 2005: personal communication). Instead, a psychology graduate student and I wrote each question on a cue card and then sorted them according to
what we felt were conceptually similar categories. We then checked for correlations among the items and changes in the categories were made if any of the items did not meet a minimum correlation coefficient of .30 with most of the other questions. Bivariate correlations were computed and the following six groupings correlated with one another at a significance level of p.<.05. With the exception of two items, the correlation coefficients for these groupings ranged from .30 to .70.

Questions 1 and 26 in the *Relevance* group had a correlation of $r = .27$. To check for internal reliability, these items were removed one at a time for separate Cronbach alpha tests. When question 26 was removed, the alpha score was lower, suggesting the item was contributing to the inter-relatedness with the other items. When question one was removed, however, the alpha score was higher; it went from .721 to .836. This suggests that question one does have as good of fit with the other items. Nevertheless, an alpha score of .721 is still acceptable. Similarly, questions 4 and 15 of the *Learning Culture* group also had a low correlation ($r = .16$). Again, separate Cronbach alpha tests with each item absent for one of the tests, showed lower scores in both situations. With all five items included the alpha score is .76. When question four was removed and rounded to the nearest hundredths place value, the score remained at .76. When question 15 was removed, the score decreased to .73. This supports keeping both items in the grouping because despite the two items having a low correlation with each other, they appear to be contributing to the inter-relatedness of the *Learning Culture* grouping.

All but four of the 26 items were clustered into one of six independent groups; the four remaining questions did not fit conceptually or psychometrically with the other groupings.
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grouping</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>range</th>
<th>alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relevance</strong></td>
<td>1. Engages teachers in sharing classroom anecdotes, lesson plans, and</td>
<td>.267</td>
<td>.704</td>
<td>0.721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>strategies.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21. Provides me with instructional strategies and lesson plans that I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>can use in my classroom.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22. Has direct bearing on my classroom practice.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25. Provides teachers the opportunity to examine and review student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>work.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26. Is integrated into daily life at school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning Culture</strong></td>
<td>4. Provides the chance to learn collaboratively with other teachers,</td>
<td>.162</td>
<td>.589</td>
<td>0.763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>building off of and contributing to the knowledge of others.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15. Fosters a trusting and supportive learning environment.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18. Provides teachers with the opportunity to build collegial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>relationships.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19. Recognizes and capitalizes on teachers’ professional knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and skills.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23. Brings together educators who share a common interest or problem.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content/Methods</strong></td>
<td>6. Provides me with the opportunity to learn in ways I’m expected to</td>
<td>.311</td>
<td>.487</td>
<td>0.634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>teach.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. Trains teachers in new curriculum and teaching strategies.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24. Focuses on deepening my subject-matter content knowledge.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**Critical Inquiry/</td>
<td>3. Provides the opportunity to make connections between theory and</td>
<td>.367</td>
<td>.539</td>
<td>0.675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application**</td>
<td>practice.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Engages teachers in critically examining beliefs about teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and learning.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Provides hands-on support in the classroom to implement new</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>curriculum and/or strategies.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Career Path</strong></td>
<td>5. Provides me with the chance to pursue my professional goals by</td>
<td>.319</td>
<td>.656</td>
<td>0.734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>myself.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Provides me with the opportunity to reflect on my practice.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Provides me with the opportunity to set professional goals.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16. Is self-directed, allowing me to choose professional development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>that is meaningful to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peer Learning</strong></td>
<td>13. Provides teachers with the opportunity to give presentations,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>lead discussions, and/or produce written work.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14. Provides teachers with the chance to observe colleagues teaching</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 shows the six groupings, the bivariate correlation range for all questions in that grouping, and the respective Cronbach alpha.

The questions in the Relevance grouping all conceptually relate to the relevance that a professional development experience might have at a classroom level: learning that could be applied to their classroom teaching. The questions in the Learning Culture grouping measure what the group values in a learning environment. Teachers are coming together over a common interest so they immediately have something in common to share. Working and learning together they build up a supportive culture that values collaboration: the knowledge and skills that each teacher brings to the learning. In the Content/Methods group, three questions identify elements of professional development that show teachers what they need to teach and how they can deliver that learning. Teachers can be taught new curriculum, develop their understanding of subject-matter knowledge and learn how to deliver that learning by undergoing the learning process themselves.

The three questions that comprise the Critical Inquiry/Application grouping go beyond professional development that tells teachers what to do to provide the chance for teachers to examine the theory behind their instruction. Question nine correlated with questions three (r = .367) and two (r = .445) but it was difficult at first to see their conceptual relationship as a group. Drawing on my own personal challenges with implementing new strategies, however, I decided that they did go together. When I have made changes in my beliefs, it has been difficult to translate those changes into changes in practice. The times when I have had the
opportunity to work with an external facilitator at the classroom level, I have been successful in initiating and sustaining changes.

The *Career Path* grouping relates to the opportunities that teachers have to reflect on what is personally meaningful to them and to then decide on what path will best meet their needs. Finally, the *Peer Learning* grouping is all about teachers teaching or leading other teachers, either as presenters, discussion partners, authors, or teaching models.

**Additional Variables**

10. Involves a short-term commitment of one or two sessions

11. Is on-going and involves a long-term commitment

17. Is school directed, allowing staffs to work on meeting school goals

20. Involves an expert presentation on educational topics, theory, and instructional strategies

Questions ten and eleven both relate to the level of commitment a teacher would make to a professional development activity, and even though they are both addressing commitment, they correlated with each other and only very weakly, but not overall with any grouping. Similarly, questions 17 and 20 each had a low correlation with one or two other questions but did not correlate with the other questions comprising the factors. As such, I made the decision to keep them as separate variables.
Informed Consent and Confidentiality/Anonymity

When teachers were contacted for the study, they were all given a copy of the cover letter explaining the purpose of the study and how their consent would be obtained should they wish to participate. Although slightly different versions of a cover letter were used for the three different sample groups (active study group members [Appendix A]; on-leave members [Appendix C]; and comparison group teachers [Appendix E]), all cover letters explained that volunteers who completed a questionnaire did so knowing that by completing a questionnaire they were giving their consent. Study group members, when asked if they would like to partake in a follow-up interview, were given two copies of the consent letter. To ensure confidentiality, all members were asked to keep one copy for their records and to hand one copy, whether signed or blank, in the box on their way out of the meeting. Members who gave their consent to participate in the study were contacted through the contact information provided on their form.

Ensuring the anonymity of the comparison group participants was less controlled than originally desired. At the two different schools where the principal and one study group member acted as contacts, they were asked to hand out questionnaires to interested English or language arts teachers and then collect the questionnaires in a sealed envelope. This way the potential participant could either choose to complete the questionnaire or not and the contact person would not know either way. The same request was also made of the other two study group members who approached district teachers in their work as facilitators in the school district. No questionnaire asked for the subject’s name and, therefore, complete
anonymity of was maintained. Confidentiality of the interview participants was maintained by using pseudonyms when referring to them in the research.
IV: Findings

The findings of the current study are presented in four parts. First, demographic findings of sub-sample group differences between gender, teaching experience, grade level, and levels of participation in study groups are presented. Then, an analysis of the six conceptual groupings – Learning Culture, Critical Inquiry, Career Path, Relevance, Content/Methods, and Peer Learning – are examined by gender, years teaching experience, grade level, and sample group. Next, the rating scale data and open-ended responses of both groups are analyzed to determine the values and priorities of each group in professional development. Finally, to assess the likeness between values and lived experience in the group, the values of the study group participants, as indicated by the importance rating scales, are compared to the existence ratings for each of those values.

Demographics

Forty-five participants were surveyed in total: twenty-six study group members, six of whom were on-leave from the group for a year, and nineteen respondents who participated as part of the comparison group. As can be seen in Table 3, among the 45 surveys received, there was an imbalance between male (n=9) and female (n=32) respondents, and this imbalance existed in both the study group and the comparison group. There was also some imbalance in the number of teachers responding from each of the five categories of years of teaching
Table 3

Demographics of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Study Group</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Comparison Group</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years Teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elem</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sec</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number. * Four respondents did not provide their gender. 

* Four respondents did not note their elementary or secondary status. 

* Elementary participants. 

* Secondary participants.

experience. Very few teachers in the 0-5 years (n=3) and 16-20 years (n=2) categories responded. The five categories were therefore collapsed into three categories: 0-10 years (n=21); 11-20 years (n=12); and 21 or more years (n=12). There were some differences between the groups in years teaching; the comparison group, as Table 3 shows, is a more experienced group. Forty-two percent of the teachers in the comparison group had taught for more than 21 years, compared with fifteen percent of the teachers in the study group. The bulk of the study group’s membership had between zero and ten years teaching experience. This may indicate that a study group may attract a less experienced teacher.

Table 3 also shows that more elementary teachers (n=30) returned surveys than did their secondary colleagues (n=11). Two consultants and three administrators also completed the survey. Due to a small sample, these consultants and administrators were recoded into the
elementary and secondary categories. One consultant and one administrator did not indicate their grade level as elementary or secondary, and were therefore coded as missing data. The imbalance between elementary and secondary respondents was similar between the study and comparison groups. At the time of the study, the school district demographic information reports 195 intermediate elementary teachers and 243 secondary teachers. Intermediate elementary teachers number only 48 fewer than secondary teachers, but the study group's target secondary audience was only grades eight to ten. The demographic data account for teachers grades eight through twelve. It is difficult to determine precisely whether the ratio of survey returns reflects a district demographic or some other factor such as an increased availability or interest in participating in a study group and/or a study about professional development by elementary teachers.

The study group members who responded to the survey revealed themselves to be very committed to attending the study group. As Table 4 shows, just over 80 percent of the members indicated that they attended most of the meetings in that school year of 2003–2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years in Study Group</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meetings(^a) Attended This Year</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About half</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One to two</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Represents the actively attending members only; the six members on leave for the year did not answer this question.
compared to only one person who said he or she only attended one or two meetings in the year. Twenty of the twenty-six surveys, or 77 percent, were returned. It is possible that the surveys not returned were members who attended less frequently. Sixty-two percent were in their first year of the study group, compared to the 27 percent and 12 percent of members who were in their second and third years, respectively. The comparison group, as it turns out, appears to be professionally active. Thirteen, or 68 percent, of comparison group participants, reported attending another study group (see Table 5). As was shown for study group participants in Table 3, less experienced teachers (0-10 years) in the comparison group were more likely to attend the study group than the more experienced teachers ([11-20] and [>21]). Of the seven teachers in the least experienced group, six (86 percent) report that they participate in a study group.

The study group was in its third year at the time of the survey and six of the seven members who were not actively attending the group were surveyed as well to determine if the reasons

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation in Study Group</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years Teaching</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.
for their absence were related to the group. All six members reported absences due to personal reasons; no one left because the group was not meeting their needs. Therefore, the large proportion of members in their first year compared to third year members was due to an increase in membership each year and possibly a growing awareness of the group, and not due to a large exodus of members.

Grouping of Likert Items

As was discussed in Chapter II, 22 of the 26 rating scale questions were grouped into six general categories: four of the questions did not fit neatly into any group. I made the categories on the basis of logic and tested their validity using multiple correlations and Cronbach’s alpha. The overall mean scores on the six groupings were then compared with

Table 6

Means of Six Groupings for Total Sample on Five Point Likert Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>r range</th>
<th>sig</th>
<th>M</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a Culture</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.162-.589</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>4.43&lt;sup&gt;def&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b Crit Inq</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.367-.539</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>4.22&lt;sup&gt;ef&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c Car Path</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.319-.656</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>4.17&lt;sup&gt;ef&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d Relevance</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.267-.704</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>4.06&lt;sup&gt;af&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e Cont/Meth</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.311-.487</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>3.75&lt;sup&gt;abc&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f Peer Learn</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.427</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>3.31&lt;sup&gt;abcd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. <sup>a</sup>Learning Culture, <sup>b</sup>Critical Inquiry/Application, <sup>c</sup>Career Path, <sup>d</sup>Content/Methods, <sup>f</sup>Peer Learning. Superscript letters are also used to refer to statistical significant differences between group means. For example, the Learning Culture<sup>a</sup> mean is significantly different from Relevance<sup>d</sup>, Content/Methods<sup>d</sup>, and Peer Learning<sup>f</sup>. <sup>x</sup> n refers to the number of questions in the grouping.
each other using a Repeated Measures ANOVA; this found a significant difference between these means ($F(5,220) = 18.304, p \leq .0005$). As can be seen in Table 6, the Learning Culture mean was highest and differed significantly from groupings, Relevance, Content/Methods, and Peer Learning. The Critical Inquiry/Application and Career Path groupings both differ significantly from the Content/Methods and Peer Learning groupings. Relevance differs significantly from Peer Learning. The lowest mean was the Peer Learning grouping. In general, all of the groups’ mean scores exceed the midpoint of the likert scale, suggesting that these groupings, or constructs, were valued by teachers.

By Gender

Females rated all six categories higher than their male peers; however there was no significant difference ($F(1,39) = 1.505, p = .227$). There also was no significant difference between gender and grouping ($F(5,195) = 0.538, p = .747$). These results should be interpreted with some caution, however, since there were only nine males in this study and there may not have been enough power to detect a gender difference.

Even though a correlation between the variable gender and the six groupings did not reach statistical significance, gender was correlated with one of the likert questions in the Learning Culture category [Q15a: Fosters a trusting and supportive learning environment] ($r = .560, p \leq 0.01$), and one variable in the Career Path grouping [Q5a: Provides me with the chance to pursue my professional goals by myself] ($r = .358, p \leq 0.05$). This correlation must also be discussed cautiously because when any large number of correlations are conducted, the
Table 7

Mean Numbers of Six Groupings for the Complete Sample, by Gender, Years of Experience, Grade Level, and Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Cult</th>
<th>Crit</th>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Rel</th>
<th>Cont</th>
<th>Peer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>n</td>
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<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.83</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* 
  a Learning Culture. 
  b Critical Inquiry/Application. 
  c Career Path. 
  d Relevance. 
  e Content/Methods. 
  f Peer Learning.
likelihood of finding a correlation increases. Male respondents ranked a trusting and supportive learning environment (Q15a) much lower than the female respondents, with only 33 percent of them ranking it highly important compared to the 84 percent of females who ranked it highly important. Similarly, only 11 percent of male respondents rated the opportunity to pursue professional goals alone as highly important (Q5a), compared to the 50 percent of women that ranked it highly important. Women in this sample, it would appear, place more importance on these two aspects of professional development. But given the small number of men represented (n=9), this finding must be interpreted cautiously.

By Years Teaching

The data in Table 7 suggest two trends over years experience with the Critical Inquiry/Application and the Career Path groupings. In the Critical Inquiry/Application grouping, the mean scores, beginning with the least experienced teachers, decrease from M = 4.49 to M=4.03, to M = 3.92 as teachers increased in experience. The difference between the means in the Critical Inquiry/Application grouping did not reach statistical significance once a Bonferonni correction (a conservative alpha of 0.0167), to control for Type I error, was applied (F(2,42) = 3.285, p=.047). To determine the direction of the trend, however, I looked at the weighted score (F(1,42) = 6.000, p=.019) and the score is on the cusp of significance which suggests a trend for mean scores for the Critical Inquiry/Application grouping to decrease as teachers gain experience.

The mean scores for the Career Path grouping, although not statistically significant, show an inverted U-shaped pattern. It would seem that importance ratings for this grouping increase
from the least experienced teachers (M = 4.04) to the middle years teachers (M = 4.54), and then decrease again with the more experienced teachers (M = 3.98). Teachers in this sample seem to change in their perceived importance for reflecting on practice, setting goals, pursuing them, and choosing learning that is personally meaningful to them.

By Grade Level
Using an adjusted alpha of .0167, mean differences between elementary and secondary teachers in the six groupings did not reach statistical significance when an independent samples t-test was conducted. It would appear that elementary and secondary teachers value characteristics of professional development similarly.

By Group
The means for all six groupings were higher for study group members than for the comparison group, but an independent t-test shows that only two of the six groupings were statistically significant: Career Path (t(43) = 3.041, p = .004) and Learning Culture (t(43) = 2.871, p = .006). To control for Type 1 error, a conservative alpha of 0.0167 was used. With this adjusted alpha, the Critical Inquiry/Application (t(43) = 2.203, p = .036) failed to reach significance. A likely explanation for this result is the high number of comparison group respondents who attended an alternate study group (n=13) and may, therefore, be more inclined to value reflective professional development than would a more random comparison group.

Within the study group, the overall mean scores on the six groupings were compared with
each other using a Repeated Measures ANOVA, which found a significant difference between the means ($F(5,125) = 19.146, p < .005$). As can be seen from Table 8, the *Learning Culture* grouping had the highest mean of all groupings. This grouping and the other two highest ranked groupings, *Career Path* and *Critical Inquiry/Application*, were statistically higher than the *Relevance*, *Content/Methods* and *Peer Learning* groupings. The lowest rated means, *Content/Methods* and *Peer Learning*, were not statistically different from each other. Like the results for the entire sample, it is interesting to note that, in general, all of the mean grouping scores exceed the midpoint of the likert scale, suggesting that all of these components were valued by the study group members.

Table 8

*Means of Groupings by Group*

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<tr>
<th>Grouping</th>
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<th>Comparison Group M</th>
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</thead>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Inq/App</td>
<td>4.42&lt;sup&gt;def&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Path</td>
<td>4.43&lt;sup&gt;def&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.80</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>4.19&lt;sup&gt;ef&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content/Meth</td>
<td>3.77&lt;sup&gt;abcd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Peer Learning</td>
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<td>3.29&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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</tbody>
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*Note.*<sup>b</sup> Critical Inquiry/Application, <sup>e</sup> Content/Methods. Superscript letters are also used to refer to statistically significant differences between group means. For example, the Learning Culture<sup>a</sup> mean is significantly different from Relevance<sup>d</sup>, Content/Methods<sup>e</sup>, and Peer Learning<sup>f</sup>.
Table 9

*Questions Ranked as a Top Five Priority, by Gender, Grade Level, Years Teaching*

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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>21</td>
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</table>

*Note.* Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number. Also, percentages were calculated using the total number of respondents but in some cases, respondents completed only partial priority ratings. For example, two women did not complete their fourth and fifth priorities. Nevertheless, the tally for each item was still divided by the total number of respondents who at least started the priority ranking question.
Priority Rankings

From the 26 likert questions provided, each participant ranked their top five priorities in order. Examining each priority ranking separately, as it turned out, was not too revealing. As such, the top five most frequently ranked priorities for study and comparison group participants are examined.

By Gender

Both males and females valued collaboration, sharing, examining beliefs, and reflection of practice. As Table 9 reveals, male and female respondents agreed on four of the same top five priorities in a professional development setting. They were:

Q1: Engages teachers in sharing classroom anecdotes, lesson plans, and strategies;
Q2: Engages teachers in critically examining beliefs about teaching and learning
Q4: Provides the chance to learn collaboratively with other teachers, building off of and contributing to the knowledge of others; and
Q7: Provides me with the opportunity to reflect on my practice.

Furthermore, frequency tallies, not shown in Table 9, reveal that when asked to select a number one priority in professional development, several respondents from both genders chose question two (examining beliefs); 56 percent of males (n=5) and 28 percent of females (n=8). Males and females did, however, select different questions for the remaining top priority (see Table 9). Tying for the final spot in the top five, 33 percent of male respondents chose questions 22, [Has direct bearing on my classroom practice], and 33 percent chose
question 23: [Brings together educators who share a common interest or problem]. Similarly, for the females, there was a three-way tie, with each question garnering 31 percent, between question 3 [Provides the opportunity to make connections between theory and practice]; question 15, [Fosters a trusting and supportive learning environment]; and question 21, [Provides me with instructional strategies and lesson plans that I can use in my classroom].

By Grade Level

Table 9 shows that elementary and secondary respondents ranked professional development opportunities to share (Q1), collaborate (Q4), and examine beliefs (Q2), in their top five priorities. The opportunity to collaborate was ranked the most frequently of all three top performers by both groups: 61 percent of elementary, and 60 percent of secondary teachers. Forty-six percent of elementary teachers additionally ranked question seven, and 39 percent ranked question 21, in the top five. Of the top five priorities, questions one and twenty-six are part of the Relevance grouping. This suggests that elementary teachers place a high value on professional development that engages them in sharing classroom stories, lessons, and strategies and equips them with practical strategies they can use. But the elementary teachers also value reflection in a professional development setting as is demonstrated by questions two, examining beliefs, and seven, reflecting on practice, being rated by 43 percent and 46 percent respectively, in the top five.

As can be seen in Table 9, there was less consensus with the secondary teachers. Eight likert items ranked as the five top priorities; they were questions two, three, four and fifteen. The other four questions, (Q1, Q9, Q18, Q22) were each rated in the top five by 30 percent of secondary teachers. Three of these questions (Q4, Q15, Q18) were three of the five questions
that made up the Learning Culture grouping, and three questions (Q2, Q3, Q9) were from the Critical Inquiry/Application grouping. The other two questions (Q1 and Q22) were two of the five questions that made up the Relevance grouping. Similar to their elementary counterparts, this suggests that secondary teachers valued the opportunity to share their work and to collaborate with other teachers to better understand why they do what they do.

Both elementary and secondary teachers also valued a learning culture that fostered trust and the building of collegial relationships; it was ranked as a top five priority by 40 percent of secondary participants and 30 percent of the elementary participants. It was the elementary teachers' sixth highest ranked priority so this result is not shown in Table 9.

By Years Teaching
As Table 9 shows, all three groups, based on years of teaching experience, highly value opportunities to collaborate (Q4) and to reflect (Q7). Question four was ranked in the top five by 60 percent, 50 percent, and 50 percent of the three groups respectively. Question seven was ranked by 40 percent, 42 percent, and 40 percent by the three different groups. The least experienced group appears the most theoretical and collegial. Sixty percent of respondents in the 0-10 category ranked critically examining beliefs (Q2) as a top priority, 40 percent of this group ranked opportunities to reflect on practice (Q7), and 30 percent ranked making connections between theory and practice (Q3). Missing from this group's top five ranked priorities is question 21: professional development that provides classroom ready strategies. This question is, however, notably ranked as a top five priority by 42 percent and 40 percent respectively, of the respondents in the middle and senior groups. Conversely, the most
Table 10

Top Five Ranked Priorities in Professional Development by Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Group</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Comparison Group</th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I value pro-d that...</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>I value pro-d that...</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>n</td>
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<td>Engages teachers in critically examining beliefs about teaching and learning.</td>
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<td>Engages teachers in critically examining beliefs about teaching and learning.</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides the chance to learn collaboratively with other teachers, building off of and contributing to the knowledge of others.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Provides the chance to learn collaboratively with other teachers, building off of and contributing to the knowledge of others.</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provides the opportunity to make connections between theory and practice.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Fosters a trusting and supportive learning environment.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provides me with the opportunity to reflect on my practice.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Provides me with instructional strategies and lesson plans that I can use in my classroom.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has direct bearing on my classroom practice.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32</td>
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</table>

*Note*. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number. Also, percentages were calculated using the total number of respondents but two respondents in the comparison group did not record a priority for the fourth and fifth priorities. Nevertheless, the tally for each item was still divided by the total number of respondents who at least started the priority ranking question.

The experienced group ranked sharing strategies (60 percent) and instructional strategies and lessons (40 percent) as top five priorities. The less experienced teachers also value professional development that is collegial (Q18) whereas collegiality (Q18) did not rank a five top priority for the two other groups.

By Group

Learning Culture: Collaboration

The *Learning Culture* was the highest rated grouping (M=4.62) for study group members is
so it is not surprising that opportunities to collaborate (Q4) was one of the most frequently ranked (64 percent) priorities in the top five (Table 10). The flip side of collaboration is isolation, or working alone. Working alone (Q5) was not a priority for study group members; only one teacher ranked it as a top five priority. In response to open-ended and interview questions, study group teachers typically commented on the importance of being able to talk and learn with other teachers and to share their work on a practical level. For example, one teacher wrote that she valued “a positive discussion about teaching,” whereas another wrote, “I also value an experience which allows for discussion of ideas between colleagues.”

Members valued the practical exchange as well, especially when they were pursuing similar goals. One participant captured this when he said, “I find it most helpful when I am not the only one attempting to use an idea or strategy; rather I like other members of the group/staff to be trying them out also so that they can share what is/is not working for them.” Several teachers in the study group commented on the value of sharing and learning together, but one study group member’s comment expresses this sentiment rather nicely: “Teachers cannot teach or professionally develop in isolation. Opportunities to meet and reflect on practice are essential.”

Teachers in the study group felt that they had benefited from the opportunity to collaborate with other colleagues. Teachers gained from “sharing successes and failures,” and from having, “…the opportunity to explore and try ideas together.” One teacher wrote, “I have learned and gleaned some great ideas from colleagues outside the confines of my own school.”
As with the study group members, Table 10 shows that collaboration was also rated a top priority by a large portion (47 percent) of the comparison group respondents. Teachers wrote that they appreciated opportunities to talk with other teachers and to share their work and ideas. For example, one teacher valued, "the opportunity to discuss ideas, theories, practices with other teachers," and another similarly wrote, "the chance to work with other teachers/share ideas & go try them out in class." Teachers in the comparison group also appreciated opportunities to learn from other teachers who had already tried out the strategy and/or lesson. One respondent valued "the opportunity to share ideas that have been classroom tested." Another teacher commented that her most valuable professional development experience was a district conference where "Teachers are sharing strategies and ideas that have worked for them in our district. They are all very realistic."

Learning Culture: Collegiality and a Safe Learning Environment

Twenty percent of study group members ranked collegiality (Q18), and 28 percent ranked a trusting and supportive environment (Q15) in their top five priorities. While these data are not shown in Table 10 as one of the five top ranked priorities, qualitative data provide additional support that study group members valued a safe and supportive learning environment. When asked, in general, what do you value in professional development, one teacher wrote, "A really great experience charges up a group of teachers to try new things and support each other." Similarly, another commented, "I want the experience to feel safe. I do not want to feel condescended to. If I feel that there is respect from all group members I am willing to take a risk. I look for support and understanding from my colleagues."
In addition to valuing a safe learning environment, members also benefited from the encouragement and support they received from other members. Comments typical of this feeling ranged from, “I also... receive encouragement and incentive to put new ideas into my practice,” to, “I enjoyed the opportunity to work with members of this group as it helped me to build confidence in presenting to teachers – [it was a] nonthreatening, ‘very safe’ group.” Teachers also valued the group’s expectation that everyone had something worthwhile to contribute. For example, one teacher said, “…even those of us just beginning the ‘process’ feel like valued members of the group.”

The community of learners established by this study group has been an asset to many of its members, benefiting members both personally and professionally. Teachers wrote about benefits such as, “I have established deeper professional relationships and personal friendships through my participation in the group,” and “It has created a network of support for both elementary and secondary teachers.” Relationships were an important part of the study group. Teachers wrote comments such as, “[I value] personal relationships – friendly faces, knowing name[s] – [it] fosters comfort and risk taking,” and, “I feel that some of the members are also my friends.” What is interesting is that not one study group teacher made these same types of comments in question one: in general, what do you value in professional development? It seems that when study group members participate in other forms of professional development, other than their study group, establishing collegial relationships is not a priority.
Whereas the written survey comments provided only positive remarks about the value of collegiality, interview data showed otherwise. All seven interviewees responded that the group was collegial, but five of the seven indicated that they did not feel connected with all of the members. For some of these interviewees, they personally did not take enough initiative to sit with new people; for others, it had to do with commitment levels of the group and group size. When asked how collegial she felt toward others, Kate responded, “I think I am more comfortable with certain people but I think that is only because I haven’t sat with them all. And because I don’t know all their names.” Joey similarly stated, ”I think its [feeling of collegiality] is growing. Yeah, you know, I need to sit at some different tables.”

Karla said that she too felt more comfortable with a core group of people. She explained:

[I] think a big part of what worked for me in the study group was there happen to be a core group of people there who I was working on my masters with. Right. And so we spent a lot of time together.

Later she added, “I just didn’t get a chance to know everyone as well because the group is so large.” She also noted the challenge of building relationships when people attended infrequently. She explained:

I struggled with trying to get to know people who would come once and then not come for three times and then come once and then not come for a few times. This was hard because then you wouldn’t get to know that person and then you wouldn’t know if you could say something.

Kelly agreed that she did not feel connected with everyone but she added that this did not translate into a lack of respect. She stated:
I certainly respect everybody’s ideas - I do think and notice that some people are much shyer and don’t act as interested in conflict. That’s fine and I’m not saying that that’s not collegial.

Kelly, another interviewee, further noted that the group was not connected enough to safely challenge one another. She said, “I don’t know if the group is really air tight to really banter ideas - to really argue with one another.”

Some study group members felt the group’s regularity helped members to establish relationships. For example, as one teacher wrote on the survey, “Also, the community we’ve developed. Meeting monthly means relationships are created which wouldn’t happen with a one-time pro-d opportunity.” But even when meeting monthly, it still takes time and patience. When asked to explain what factors played a role in the collegiality of the group, Kelly explained:

Time. When you only see people once a month…. [Look at my] class that meets every second day and its not gelled until after the break and by that time they’ve seen each other 45 times. Really get, to be able to communicate takes a long time. [The] inception of the group [was] three years ago - not even - two and a half - so that means 25 meetings and not everyone has attended those.

When asked on the survey to list advice for future study groups, one member similarly commented:
Feel comfortable with the ambiguity of working together over time. Work to establish a tone of mutual support and respect. It takes a lot of time for teachers to settle in and identify how and what they want to explore and change in their practice.

In addition to time, group size was a factor in determining levels of collegiality in the group. Listing advice for future study groups, group size recommendations ranged from, “…find a way to keep the group fairly small”, to “a reasonable size,” to, “advertise to ensure you get a large enough group.” The vagueness of these references made it difficult to determine what size members thought ideal. Karla provided a bit of insight when she explained:

I think if you have a smaller group of people there’s more sense of connectedness and I guess a bigger sense of letting people down if you don’t show up. But if there’s 30 people, then you won’t be missed.

Kelly provided more specific feedback on group size. She said, “I don’t know how a group of 50 would work.” She added:

All the best classes that I’ve been in where there has been honesty and people being really bold have been classes between 20 and 25. I really think that is [the] optimum number for me anyways. Even, if I could have 20 students, I just think that is brilliant. There is enough to have a variety of opinions, which I think if you start getting fewer than 20 you start losing that. But there is also few enough people, there is a small enough number where you can create real relationships and you can build trust and I can blab on and on about how I might argue but they’re never... (inaudible).
In sum, learning in a safe and supportive environment is important to study group members. Establishing this community, members explained, has its challenges; members feel most comfortable sharing with teachers they know best, and getting to know new members takes time, regular commitment, and working in smaller groups.

More comparison group participants ranked collegiality and a trusting learning environment as a top five priority than did study group members. Not shown in Table 10, 24 percent of comparison group teachers, compared to 20 percent of study group members, ranked building collegiality (Q18) in their top five priorities. Table 10 shows that a trusting and supportive learning environment (Q15) was a high priority for many comparison group teachers. Thirty-five percent ranked it in the top five, compared to 28 percent of study group members.

Teachers in the comparison group did not mention the importance of learning in an environment where they felt safe, but a few participants wrote about participating in a professional activity where they felt supported or connected to their peers by a common interest or by choosing to be there. Discussing her experience, one teacher wrote, “I have enjoyed all of my school pro-d’s and joint pro-d’s this year. I really feel like we are a team since for the most part we all attend, work together or separately when needed, and end feeling a sense of direction and accomplishment.” Another teacher wrote, “I attended with colleagues from my school and was therefore able to share ideas, experiences and encouragement from each other.”
Learning Culture: Common Interest or Problem

Having shared interests or problems were valued by study group members. Not shown in Table 10, question 23, [Brings together educators who share a common interest or problem.] was ranked in the top five by 24 percent of study group members. The open-ended data provide insight into this. Having things in common was not limited to topic but extended to sharing goals, philosophies, and commitment to teaching and growing as professionals. On the survey, teachers writing about their study group valued “working and learning with a group of fellow teachers... who share the same passion and philosophy as me,” and liked “learning from others who are also interested in improving practice.” Teachers appreciated the commitment their colleagues were making to their learning. One teacher described it this way: “I love the caliber of teaching, the commitment.” Three of the interviewees elaborated on the admiration they held for their colleagues and how this inspired them. When the interviewee Noah was asked to describe what he valued in the group he said:

The quality of the people. I mean at the very beginning I was almost, I wouldn’t say intimidated, but it was just like, “Wow!” These people are like dynamite teachers. Especially the secondary teachers. .... But the quality of educators in that group is outstanding I think. And I think in general those are the type of people who are going to be part of a group like this. People who are really committed to the profession who are going to take an hour and a half on a Thursday afternoon to do this.

When asked how important it was to her to meet with other teachers who shared a common interest, an interviewee, Karla, clarified that it was not necessary for members to share a specific interest but rather, more general interests and personal characteristics such as a willingness to learn. She explained:
Well, I think, even though I did say common interest, I don’t think you have to have a common interest. I think that improving your reading or writing was our common interest but there is so much under that umbrella. You know that I don’t think a like-minded group of people is a good thing to have because when you have differing ideas and opinions then that helps you expand your own ideas and opinions.

She added:

At the same time I find that when I’m in a school where I don’t have teachers or people with the same open-mindedness or interest to try new things or willingness to experiment, that can be really frustrating. So in this group, there is that. With the people that I’ve worked with. That’s what attracts me to keep being a part of it. So not [only] is it just the common interest, but it’s just the, maybe more the common goal of being a better teacher within the reading and writing.

Having a common interest also had the benefit of focusing the conversation. Joey stated, “[Its] key. If everyone wants something different and a facilitator is trying to give everyone what they want you almost sometimes get nothing.” Ann added, “I think it’s important to have that common interest to focus the discussion.”

In sum, study group members valued having things in common with their colleagues. It appeared to bring them together and focus their learning.

Like study group participants, 24 percent of comparison group teachers ranked shared interests as a top five priority. Because shared interests (Q23) was not ranked as high as other
Table 11

*Infrequently Ranked Priorities by Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Group</th>
<th>Q</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Comparison Group</th>
<th>Q</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I value pro-d that...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Provides the opportunity to make connections between theory and practice.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides me with the chance to pursue my professional goals by myself.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Provides me with the opportunity to learn in ways I'm expected to teach.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides me with the opportunity to learn in ways I'm expected to teach.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Involves a short-term commitment of one or two sessions.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involves a short-term commitment of one or two sessions.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Trains teachers in new curriculum and teaching strategies.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trains teachers in new curriculum and teaching strategies.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Provides teachers with the opportunity to give presentations, lead discussion, and/or produce written work.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides teachers with the opportunity to give presentations, lead discussion, and/or produce written work.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Is school directed, allowing staffs to work on meeting school goals.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides teachers with the chance to observe colleagues teaching.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Recognizes and capitalizes on teachers' professional knowledge and skills.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is school directed, allowing staffs to work on meeting school goals.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Involves an expert presentation on educational topics, theory, and instructional strategies.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes and capitalizes on teachers' professional knowledge and skills.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Provides teachers the opportunity to examine and review student work.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides teachers the opportunity to examine and review student work.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Is integrated into daily life at school.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is integrated into daily life at school.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Priorities, it is not shown in Table 10. Despite the two groups giving this item the same ranking, the comparison group did not refer to it very frequently in the open-ended responses. This, however, does not mean it is valued any less, only that it was not mentioned frequently.
One teacher did comment on how she liked attending a district conference with other teachers who were interested in similar learning and were there by choice. She wrote, "I was energized by being in a setting where everyone was there by choice! We shared a common interest." Two other teachers similarly discussed participating in school-wide professional development and valued the shared focus. Having things in common: interests, goals, philosophy, seemed to be a real motivator for teachers in the study group, and to those in the comparison group who mentioned it.

Learning Culture: Teacher Expertise

As can be see in Table 11, infrequently ranked priorities, recognizing and capitalizing on teachers' expertise, was not ranked by any individual in either study group or comparison group as a top five priority. Given that both groups ranked collaboration and sharing (see Table 10) as a top five priority, it is surprising that question 19 was not a higher priority. One reason for this might be that the wording of question 19 [Recognizes and capitalizes on teachers' professional knowledge and skills] might have been unclear or too formal.

Asked about what they value in general, teachers in the study group commented that they valued an expert presenter but more comments addressed the value of learning from other teachers who had already tried the idea or strategy in the classroom. Comments made by some study group members further suggest a high level of respect for the expertise of other members. For example, one member wrote, "I am surrounded by teachers who are so knowledgeable and passionate about teaching reading and writing." This suggests that a willingness to learn from other teachers requires the learner to respect the work of the
teacher-presenter. One interviewee, Joey discussed how it took some time before he accepted 'expert' as part of his own professional identity. He explained:

Um, I think it took awhile before people started to feel that, “Hey I really have some expertise.” In [the] beginning I felt I was going to go and just be a collector or a listener and think about my program while everyone else is talking. [It] didn’t take long before I felt like I could share and I would okay with other’s reactions.

Study group members valued the contributions other teachers make to their own learning, but it may, for some teachers at least, take some time and experience before teachers feel confident in the expertise they have to share.

Similarly, opportunities to present were not a top priority with study group members (see Table 11), and only two teachers commented in the survey responses on benefiting from the opportunity to present to other teachers. For example one teacher, when asked how he or she had benefited from the study group, wrote, “opportunities to present and collaborate.”

Like the study group participants, the comparison group teachers also commented that they valued an expert presenter. In addition to expert teachers, two teachers from the comparison group also specifically mentioned the importance of teacher presenters; one valued a “mix of practicing teachers and ‘expert’ presenters,” and the other valued professional development that “…is led by an experienced classroom teacher.”

Comparison group respondents, like study group members, commented on the value of
sharing and learning from other teachers who had already tried the idea or strategy in the classroom. For example, one comparison group respondent valued, “the chance to work with other teachers/share ideas,” and another teacher wrote that he or she valued, “the opportunity to share ideas that have been classroom tested.”

In sum, there was recognition by both groups for the importance of learning from other teachers, in particular, the exchange of ideas and strategies that have been classroom tested.

Critical Inquiry/Application

Two of the three items that make up the Critical Inquiry/Application grouping, the second highest ranked grouping (M=4.42), were highly ranked in the top five priorities by study group members. Opportunities to critically examine beliefs about teaching and learning (Q2) and to make connections between theory and practice (Q3) were ranked by 56 percent and 32 percent of study group members respectively (Table 10). The third item of this grouping, receiving hands-on support with implementation of new learning (Q9), was ranked by 16 percent of study group members as a top five priority.

Writing about their general values in professional development, several study group teachers commented on the importance of critical inquiry. Comments on this ranged from, “It is important for me to develop a greater understanding of my teaching philosophy and look at research that confirms or challenges this philosophy, then links to a pragmatic approach in the school/classroom setting,” to, “I like looking at underlying ‘Big Ideas’ and then connecting these ideas to what I am already doing in my practice.” Two teachers specifically
addressed the value of examining their beliefs. One teacher wrote, “[It is valuable] to examine my beliefs about teaching and learning,” and the other teacher similarly valued, “the exploration of fundamental beliefs.”

Study group participants’ responses relating to Critical Inquiry/Application differed, however, between open-ended questions one (general values in professional development) and two (values in the study group). Where study group members indicated value for the opportunity to explore beliefs and to make connections between theory and practice in response to question one, mention of these values was absent in response to question two. In other words, when asked in question two what they valued about the study group specifically, examining beliefs and theory-practice connections were not mentioned. This finding supports results from comparisons between importance and existence rankings (as reported in Table 14) that also show that the existence of these two components in the study group did not match the importance it held for group members. The mean difference between the importance and existence rankings for examining beliefs (Q2) was just over one point on the likert scale, and the mean difference for making connections between theory and practice (Q3) was just under one point on the scale.

Some of the interviewees would have liked more opportunities to engage in critical inquiry. A lot of sharing occurred in the group, but as Kelly explained, not enough critical discussion occurred. She stated, “We are very polite, very careful – haven’t seen really challenge of ideas yet.” When asked what she thought it would take for that to occur, she replied:
(A) common base, studying one kind of big idea or philosophy [and] asking the same question. There is not a lot of tension with [our study group] because it is so broad; literacy is a broad goal. I was having this discussion with my kids. I mean there is a debate, is there a right and a wrong? Is there a better and a worse way of doing things? And we never kind of get down to that. So we talk about literature circles versus class novels but we don’t get into a debate about which way is the best way to teach literature. We just kind of say if you want to do literature circles this is what you can do, and if you want to do a class novel this is what you can do. I think there is room for a real examination. Getting away from all the soft and fuzzy stuff. What do you do in your classroom? What should I change? What really shouldn’t I be doing? And having people say, I don’t really agree with this. To me, that would be powerful.

Erica, another interviewee, discussed the need for more intellectually focused professional development, such as the kind Kelly would appreciate. Erica explained:

But I really think we miss out on a whole group of teachers who are very intellectual and very good at practice and can articulate that connection. But they’re not given that opportunity so they’re not going to talk about their practice if they have to separate it from the theory. Yet we have this huge trend that says we just want to focus on our practice, and theory is just for the intellectuals. And we market pro-d like that. And I think that actually takes these people out because everybody wants a new idea. People have lots of good ideas - sometimes they want a reason for using their good ideas.
The desire for more theoretical learning and the experience of safely challenging peers on their thinking and practices, was for some, an important element of professional development. Three of the seven interviewees explained how the group influenced their thinking about what was important in teaching writing. For example, Noah described things that had changed for him:

That kids write best when they’re connected to whatever they’re writing to or their experiences or whatever. Kids write about what they’re engaged in. Find out what they want to write about. Their writing is far better. Give them choices – dragons, horses – some of the best writing was when they chose the topics they loved than just saying write a story about a murder mystery.

Two other interviewees, Ann and Kate, both felt the group validated and supported their beliefs. Ann said “I think that my beliefs have been supported by the group. I don’t know that my philosophy or beliefs have really changed. I think their just stronger and have more back to them.” The two secondary interviewees, Kelly and Erica said the group had not changed their beliefs; they simply stated, “No,” and, “No. I think they’re fairly consistent.”

Like study group participants, some teachers in the comparison group also noted the value of critical inquiry. Table 10 shows that 29 percent of comparison group teachers ranked examining beliefs about teaching and learning (Q2) as a top five priority, compared to 56 percent of study group members. Whereas comparison group participants value examining beliefs, they place much less emphasis on opportunities to make connections between theory and practice. Table 11 shows that only six percent (n=1) of comparison group teachers ranked this as a top five priority. This compared to 32 percent of study group members.
Comparison group participants did, however, place a higher priority on receiving hands-on support to implement new learning (Q9). Not shown in Table 10, 25 percent of comparison group teachers ranked this third item of the Critical Inquiry/Application grouping as a top five priority. Sixteen percent of study group members ranked this in their top five priorities.

Some comparison group teachers, however, discussed theory in the open-ended section of the written survey. One teacher valued, “sharing of ideas + knowledge which will cause me to question, inquire, reflect critically.” Another teacher, although interested in theory, remarked, “Some theory yes, but the key is practicality.” Even though 29 percent of comparison group participants ranked examining beliefs (Q2) as a top five priority only one teacher remarked about this value in the open-ended data. This teacher wrote, “The most valued item is to critically analyze beliefs and teaching as I believe in order to learn and grow in our practice, basic beliefs need examining.”

In addition to looking at questions that were ranked in the top five, it is also revealing to look at the questions that were selected only once, or not at all. Neither the study group nor the comparison group rated training in new curriculum and strategies (Q12) as a top five priority (Table 11). This finding lends support to data showing that the two groups value learning that engages them in critical thinking more than a telling to of new curriculum and strategies.

Career Path

The opportunity to reflect on practice was a high priority for study group members; 52 percent ranked it as a top five priority (Table 10). Not shown in Table 10 because they were
not as frequently ranked, setting professional goals (Q8) and self-directed professional development (Q16) were ranked as a top five priority by 20 and 12 percent respectively. Compared to other items, self-directed professional development (Q8) did not rank that highly. However, Table 11 shows that, its opposite, school directed professional development (Q17), was even less popular. Not one study group member ranked it as a top five priority. This suggests a high value for personal choice in professional development.

Similar to the priorities placed on the likert items, the opportunity to reflect on practice (Q7), and the chance to choose personally meaningful professional development (Q15) were more frequently mentioned by study group members in the open-ended data. Study group members wrote that they valued opportunities to reflect provided by the study group. “Opportunities to meet and reflect on practice are essential,” wrote one teacher. The study group provided scheduled time for reflection, something teachers in the study group benefited from. “Sometimes teachers get so busy they forget to reflect. The study group has basically carved time for me to reflect on my teaching,” wrote one teacher. Similarly, another teacher commented, “I have had an opportunity to share professionally what I am currently working on (towards) in my own practice. This has spurred me on to take a closer look and reflect on my teaching.” Others commented on rethinking assumptions. For example, one teacher wrote, I think it is important to question your own practices and to really think about why you do what you do.”

Study group teachers also valued choosing learning that held meaning for them. For example, one teacher wrote, “I value an experience which interests me and is in an area in which I
need to improve.” In addition to personally interesting, another teacher wrote about choice in professional learning. She wrote, “Also, the experience has to be personally meaningful (in relation to self-directed pro-d).”

Not shown in Table 10, comparison group teachers also valued opportunities to reflect; 24 percent ranked this as a top five priority. Open-ended comments suggest that comparison group teachers also valued the process of reflection. Some teachers simply stated that they valued “time for reflection,” or, “sharing of ideas, plus knowledge which would cause me to question, inquire, reflect critically.” One teacher went into more detail about the lack of time for reflection: “Coming to work but having time to think. The day to day experience is so busy in my school that I have little time to review, reflect and redirect my practice.”

In sum, both groups valued the chance to reflect. Study group members also valued having the choice to decide on their professional path. Neither group emphasized setting goals or pursuing them by oneself.

Relevance

Relevant professional development was a priority for study group members. First, the mean score for the Relevance grouping (M=4.19) averaged just over four on a five point likert scale (see Table 7). Furthermore, Table 10 shows that the highest five ranked priorities of the study group include sharing lessons and strategies (Q1) and professional development that has a direct bearing on practice (Q22). These were ranked by 44 percent and 32 percent respectively. Interestingly, other items comprising the Relevance grouping were not ranked
in the top five at all. As can be seen in Table 11, opportunities to examine student work (Q25) was not ranked in the top five by any study group participant; professional development that is integrated into daily life at school (Q26) was only ranked by four percent (n=1) of study group members. It would appear that study group members value particular aspects of relevance over others.

Open-ended data also show that study group members value certain aspects of relevant professional development. Teachers wrote comments such as, “It is also important to leave a ProD experience with something you can use immediately,” and “I need to achieve the most in my pro-d time as possible. I need to feel that it will a have a direct impact on my practice.” The study group participants valued the exchanges between colleagues that allowed them to share their day-to-day teaching. “I like to hear what other teachers are doing and to hear what tensions other teachers grapple with,” wrote one teacher. And within the study group teachers viewed these exchanges as relevant: “I also value the useful ideas that can be used to effectively teach the students in my class.”

Only a handful of teachers mentioned that they valued having access to student and teacher samples. One of these teachers commented that the samples improved not only her work, but also that of her students: “Seeing student and teacher examples of work/lessons [is] useful to help my lessons and [the] quality of student work.”

Several study group members mentioned the value of getting introduced to a new resource, and specifically valued this about their group. Teachers commented with broad statements
such as, "I get directed toward some great resources," to comments directed at a specific resource, "The Nancie Atwel resource." When asked for advice for future study groups, several members agreed that using a common resource was important in a study group setting. For example, Noah recommended, "[the] resource was really good, having a common basis for your discussion. [It] centers your discussions," but most people simply stated, "a common resource."

In sum, both groups value relevant, transferable learning. Study group members mentioned sharing between teachers more frequently than comparison group participants did.

Relevance (M=3.88), also valued by comparison group respondents, in particular the item, leaving with ready-to-use instructional strategies (Q21). Twenty-nine percent of comparison group teachers ranked instructional strategies as a top five priority. Like study group participants, Table 11 shows that only one comparison group participant ranked opportunities to examine student work (Q25) as a top five priority, and no one ranked professional development that is integrated into daily life at school (Q26) in their top five.

The comparison group teachers valued practical professional development that is transferable to current classroom practice. One teacher captured this sentiment when she wrote that she valued, "Feeling that I know why I'm there. That means that I am getting valuable info, building good relationships or doing some valuable sharing. I don't leave thinking, 'What a waste.'" For a couple of teachers, the need for the learning to transfer immediately into their practice was very important. One of these teachers wrote that he or she valued, "Learning about a good strategy or resource which I can use the next day in my classroom," but for
most teachers, they only needed to know the learning was relevant to their practice. These teachers wrote comments like, "I can see myself using the information in my own classroom," or, "[I value] practical strategies and ideas which can be applied directly and yet comprehensively to the daily classroom environment." The learning did not need to be used the next day.

Learning new ideas and strategies was mentioned by some of the comparison group teachers in the open-ended section of the survey. One teacher displayed humour with the comment, "The opportunity to learn new things. You can teach an old dog new tricks." Teachers were also very interested in working with or acquiring resources through their professional development activities.

Content/Methods

Professional development focused on providing more practical content and methodological knowledge and skills was valued by study group members as indicated by its mean score of 3.77, but the mean score was fifth highest of six mean rankings. Furthermore, the items that comprise the Content/Methods grouping were infrequently ranked as a top five priority. Table 11 shows that two of the three items [Q6: Provides me with the opportunity to learn in ways I’m expected to teach; Q12: Trains teachers in new curriculum and teaching strategies] comprising this grouping were each only ranked by one study group member as a top five priority. The third item [Q24: Focuses on deepening my subject-matter content knowledge], was a higher priority than the other two items. Not shown in either Table 10 or Table 11,
deepening subject matter (Q24) was ranked by 20 percent of study group members as a top five priority.

This trend is also represented by the open-ended data; professional development that involved deepening subject knowledge or letting teachers learn in ways they are expected to teach was not mentioned by very many study group members. One teacher expressed value for the chance to, "deepen understanding about the process of writing and reading and the process of higher cognitive skills." Instead teachers commented more about valuing adding new ideas, perspectives, and resources to their professional tool box, and listed items such as, "learning new approaches," and professional development that “…provide[s] [me with] new approaches/ information/ strategies” as important. Only one teacher specifically mentioned learning about district initiatives: “I am also introduced to new resources and practices/initiatives in the district that blend well with my LA program.”

As with the study group, the Content/Methods grouping was ranked by the comparison group fifth out of six groupings (M=3.67). Similarly, the items comprising the grouping were not frequently ranked as a top priority. Table 11 shows that only one comparison group teacher ranked training in new curriculum and strategies (12) as a top priority. Not shown in either Table 10 or Table 11, 24 percent did rank question six [Provides me with the opportunity to learn in ways I’m expected to teach], as a top five priority. Similarly, only 12 percent ranked deepening subject matter as a top concern.

The open-ended data support the finding that comparison group participants value
professional development that involves modeling or practice learning. For example, one teacher who attended a math conference appreciated that, “the entire day was broken into usable teaching ideas/strategies. Each section provided an opportunity to try the activity,” and a teacher attending a multiple intelligences workshop wrote that the “interactive, hands-on learning” opportunities were valuable. Similarly, another teacher found it valuable that her presenter modeled how the strategies could be used. She wrote, “This teacher walked us through several techniques/strategies he used with his high school and college students. His package contained dozens of practical ideas & samples. He modeled numerous activities.”

In sum, the study group emphasized the building of their repertoire, whereas the comparison group was more interested in having hands-on experiences before returning to the classroom.

Peer Learning

*Peer Learning* was the least valued grouping (M=3.33) for study group members. Table 11 reveals that the two items comprising this grouping are not a priority to study group members. Only one member ranked the opportunity to present, lead discussions, and publish work (Q13) as a top five priority, and not one member selected opportunities to observe other teachers (Q14) as a top priority.

In the open-ended data, study group members did not explicitly discuss the value in having the opportunity for teachers to give presentations and lead discussions (Q13) but they did on many occasions comment on the value of sharing and discussing their work with other teachers. What teachers valued then were the more informal collaborative opportunities that
involved more interaction and where everyone was involved in sharing, rather than more formal presentations. Open-ended data that supported this draws from comments made about collaborating, sharing, and discussing. For example, one member, commenting on her study group wrote, “I get to listen to colleagues and engage in focused conversation regarding educational issues.” Another teacher valued, “working and learning with a group of fellow teachers.” One teacher did specifically mention that she felt more confident in her presenting skills. She wrote, “I enjoyed the opportunity to work with members of this group as it helped me to build confidence in presenting to teachers.”

As with the study group, comparison group members valued the Peer Learning grouping the least (M=3.29). Furthermore, as Table 11 shows, only six percent (n=1) of comparison group participants ranked presenting, publishing, and leading discussions (Q13), and 12 percent (n=2) ranked observing other teachers (Q14), top priorities. Despite low priority rankings, open-ended comments made by comparison group teachers do show that they viewed their peers as their teachers, and like the study group members, this learning was most meaningful when it was collaborative. Two teachers did value the role of teacher as presenter. One preferred a, “mix of both practicing teachers and ‘experts’ presenters,” and the other valued professional development that is, “…led by an experienced classroom teacher.”

Length of Commitment

As is shown in Table 12, the mean scores for professional development that involves a short-term commitment of one or two sessions (Q10) are lower for all category groups than the means for ongoing, regular professional development, suggesting that there was a higher
Table 12

*Likert Response Means and Standard Deviations for Length of Commitment By Gender, Years Teaching, Grade Level, and Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Short-term (Q10)</th>
<th></th>
<th>Ongoing (Q11)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>32</td>
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<tr>
<td>0-10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;21</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elem&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sec&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Scores were rounded to the nearest hundredth decimal place. <sup>a</sup> Elementary respondents. <sup>b</sup> Secondary respondents.

value on longer-term professional development. There are no clear differences between gender, the beginning (0-10 years), middle (11-20 years), and most experienced teachers (>21 years); mean scores for the three groups are minor. The study group respondents appear to value ongoing professional development (M = 4.00) more than the comparison group participants (M = 3.37). There is some variability in all the categories as is seen in the high standard deviations in Table 12. An example of this variability can be seen in a crosstabulation of questions 10 and 11 by group (see Table 13). More study group (42
Table 13

*Crosstabulation of Commitment Level Rating on Five Point Likert Scale by Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Medium</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>High</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comparison Group</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number. \(^a\) Refers to question 10 on the survey. \(^b\) Refers to question 11 on the survey.

percent) members rated ongoing commitment as a high priority, than did the comparison group participants (21 percent).

The open-ended data similarly show that study group members valued the ongoing learning the study group afforded them because it helped to build trust in the group and kept teachers focused on bettering their practice. As one teacher put it, "Also, the community we've developed. Meeting monthly means relationships are created which wouldn't happen with a one-time pro-d opportunity." Some teachers wrote simple comments such as, "I value meeting regularly," and others wrote lengthier statements like, "I also value having a
monthly reason to keep focusing/reminding myself about Best Practices in writing. With all the demands we face, often some things get pushed aside."

It became more complicated when I looked at what teachers were saying about expectations to commit for the long-term; some teachers felt the study group should be more strict about attendance, while others voiced the need for flexibility. One teacher wrote that study groups needed to, “require a commitment (e.g., free book if you attend the sessions),” and another said, “Try to make people accountable for attending as we are all so busy.” Another member disagreed and referred to the need for a study group to allow group members to either leave the group if it was not meeting their needs or to “take a leave” and return when the individual felt it was appropriate. In his interview, Joey similarly noted that commitments outside of teaching sometimes keep him from attending. He stated:

...that Thursday, I couldn’t get there, between family and stuff. I guess you just have to be okay with that. I’m glad...the way our group is run. It just allows you to miss things.”

When asked if that comes from the facilitator, he replied:

I think it does. It does from the point of view because he appreciates that, that people are busy and they can’t always be at everything. You know, so he doesn’t ... I think if you put people on people, even if it isn’t direct, like where were you? We were counting on you. Or, like if you might start again that pressure on people. We’re fortunate to have that critical mass of people because every session runs even if there is only 4, or 5, or 6 people make it that month, because its December and everyone is busy or June and you know people don’t have the time. It still operates. Whether its
conscious on his part or not he just kind of - that’s his character and he knows it will work, it will work out, people will want this thing and I don’t have to force it.

Although some teachers, as was mentioned earlier in the Collegiality section, want members to attend regularly in order to establish a strong community feeling, attending every meeting, some members noted, is very difficult.

Six of the twenty-six members surveyed were “on-leave” from the group. I contacted them to complete a survey to determine the reasons for their leaves. All six teachers responded that their reasons for were due to personal circumstances. Although I did not ask them to reveal these reasons, some did anyway. One member, an administrator, wrote, “Busy admin schedule and no direct need (e.g. not teaching writing at the moment so other more pressing issues/meetings take precedence).” One respondent mentioned that family commitments were the priority, and another teacher was no longer working on the days of the meetings but found her schedule too full. She wrote, “Would love to go; have it on my calendar every month, but other activities that I must do at home interfere. Not working Thursdays doesn’t help.” Similarly another teacher’s work schedule changed and she also no longer worked on Thursdays. These data suggest that having the time to attend an ongoing learning experience, such as a study group, is a major factor in determining whether or not teachers felt they can attend. This was also found with the comparison group teachers.

When describing their most valuable professional development experiences, only three teachers specifically mentioned ongoing, or learning activities that involved follow-up. But when asked if they would be interested in attending an ongoing study group that would meet
monthly, 13 out of the 19 (68 percent) said they would be interested. Of those thirteen who said they would be interested, six already participated in a study group. Several reasons, such as networking, collegiality, new ideas, feedback on teaching, developing common knowledge, and keeping accountable to new learning, were provided that would make participating in a study group worthwhile. One teacher seemed to almost sum it up when she wrote, "Yes, because it promotes a sense of togetherness + networking – people you can contact to share + discuss ideas, or ask ‘stupid’ questions without feeling stupid, - also it helps raise the comfort level + motivation to try new things and share back how it went."

Almost half of the comparison group teachers who answered the survey question, "Would participating in a study group where teachers who share a common interest met regularly (ie. monthly) appeal to you? Why or why not?", (Q4) raised concerns about the lack of time available for this type of continued professional development. Comments ranged from:

Yes, but time constraints of this job are making this increasingly more difficult. I’m tired at the end of the day and even though I would really like to participate the energy from teaching all day and the paper work and the committee work at the school level is overwhelming,

to,

"Yes, I love to explore ideas in a trusting atmosphere where there is time to get to the core of an issue and reflect. The only problem is TIME. Already feel strapped for time,"

to,
“No. Quite frankly I just don’t have the time. Between teaching, planning, extra­
curricular, marking (our job is so not 9-3!) and having a balanced life with family,
friends and wellness – I just can’t imagine trying to fit something else in. However,
an e-mail type discussion or idea share would work.”

It would seem that a major impediment to teachers participating in a study group is time,
even when they think the group might benefit them.

Additional categories emerged from the open-ended data that were not specifically addressed
by Likert questions on the survey. These categories are: professional growth, changes in
practice, motivation, group composition, student achievement, spin-offs, and participant
driven learning.

Professional Growth

One outcome, it would seem, of a safe and encouraging learning culture, was the professional
growth many teachers commented on. Some teachers felt that they had become better
teachers, whereas others felt they were more confident in their professional abilities.
Examples of this increased confidence come from statements such as, “I feel much more
confident in the quality of my program,” and, “[I have] more confidence in myself as a
teacher – I am willing to take more risks,” and,

It [the study group] empowered me. I felt a lot better about my language arts
program. You know, in particular, like everybody has their subjects that they feel
really confident in and language arts wasn’t one I felt confident in but I really enjoyed
teaching it.
Some benefited from knowing what others were doing in other classrooms because it gave teachers a bit of a professional benchmark. One teacher wrote that she benefited from being, "able to see what others do and thereby have a sense of how my own development as a teacher is progressing." Joey agreed when he noted:

The opportunity to hear what others were doing so I could in some ways validate what I was doing already. To say, okay, good, I’m actually teaching language arts similar ways to others [and I could] hear about things I wasn’t doing.

Finally, one teacher on the survey wrote about an increased understanding of his colleagues. He wrote, “I have learned about the variety of ways my colleagues learn and how and why they make the choices and face the struggles they do.”

Changes in Practice

All the interview subjects discussed how participating in the study group had influenced their practice. Changes went beyond implementing a new strategy shared by the group; the changes were often changes in the process of teaching students to write, and in how to use assessment and evaluation most meaningfully. The types of changes made ranged for the interviewees from marking less to allowing for more choice. As an example, Noah wrote that he does, “more modeling for the kids, more direct in [his] approach to writing. Like I know how to break it down and guide the kids through for all the different types of writing whether its poetry or you know, whatever.” He added, “giving kids choice.” Other interviewees felt the study group did not really alter their practice, but instead kept them focused on their
learning. Kelly, for example, explained, “[I] don’t think it [my practice] has changed from the group but what the group is doing is keeping it [my practice] at the front of my mind, kind of the forefront for me.”

Changes in practice, the survey data showed, were often associated with the common resource used by the group, Nancie Atwel’s (2002) *Lessons That Change Writers*. For example, one teacher wrote, “I tried writer’s workshop because of the Atwel resource. I’ve learned/tried a new way of teaching.”

Commitment and Motivation

Several study group members discussed motivation as a key factor in assessing the value of professional development. For example one teacher wrote, “I am inspired after every meeting and so happy that we have a group of dedicated teachers working to inspire others.” Working with people who are passionate, supportive and eager to share their work, had the benefit of invigorating members. These comments ranged from “I have also met some great people who encourage, excite and support me. The study group helps make teaching fun and learning exciting in such a challenging and stressful work environment,” to, “I have never left a ‘session’ without some wonderful ideas and a new motivation to make learning more meaningful and interesting for my students.” Another teacher explained how the group provided the community she had been lacking. She wrote, “Having taught in five schools in the past six years, I found myself craving a motivated, supportive, learning environment.” The energy people felt from participating in the group was really important to them.
The energy built up in a professional development setting was important to some comparison group teachers, but was not mentioned by most. A couple of teachers commented on the importance of the energy of the presenter, while others remarked on the positive energy from working with other teachers. As one teacher put it, “I want to leave feeling energized, rather than overwhelmed.”

In sum, study group members benefited from the energy the group provided them. Although this was not mentioned by comparison group teachers, that could be because it was not as relevant to them as it was to study group members who were still actively attending the group that this survey was based on.

Group Composition

Two themes emerged from the study group’s responses to question two: what do you specifically value in the study group? First, members liked the variety of grades, specialties, and schools that were represented. An elementary member wrote, “Grades 4-12; as an upper-intermediate teacher we are often the “upper/older” end of the spectrum (at workshops, with resources, etc.). I love hearing secondary ideas and adapting them,” whereas a secondary colleague values, “working with elementary teachers.” One person commented that he or she liked, “That many schools are represented,” and another teacher valued, “talking to teachers of varying subject fields and grade levels – ideas of how the same lesson can be used at many levels.”

Second, the study group members really appreciated learning with other teachers who were
open-minded and flexible, and very committed to professional development. Comments that support this finding ranged from, “I personally appreciate the willingness of group members to engage in the messy process of inquiry. I think we model to each other the importance of life long learning,” to learning with others who, “share the same passion and philosophy as me.” Another teacher wrote that at the study group, “everyone wants to be there,” suggesting there are times when learning occurs in a group, perhaps a staff, with some resistors. One secondary interviewee, Erica, commented that she appreciated the positive attitudes of the elementary members. She explained:

The elementary thing is a big deal. I don’t think people understand what a difference there is between elementary and secondary as far as atmosphere and I remember because afterwards I’m telling (another member) afterwards, “Those elementary school teachers, they are just always so happy! They don’t sit and complain and they don’t complain about trivial things, they complain about important things.” And she (the other member) goes, “Yeah, its very different,” because she used to teach in elementary right? So she said it’s very different.

Erica’s description of high school environments suggests that she believes elementary schools to be more positive and she likes having these teachers as part of her group for that reason.

Student Achievement

In addition to benefiting from the study group themselves, some teachers felt that their students had become better writers. One teacher demonstrated this by writing “I have been able to implement meaningful writing lessons which have improved my students’ writing in
various areas.” Another teacher asserted, “I am much more focused in my teaching of writing and I’ve seen growth in my students.”

Spin-offs
Twp district conferences, one for students, and one for teachers, were organized by the study group. Teachers in the study group valued these extensions of the group and felt they were a great benefit to all involved. For one teacher it was an “opportunity to present at other venues,” and for another it was a positive experience to have the “opportunity to be a part of a valuable experience like the (conferences).” One teacher described it this way, “It [the study group] provides a forum to explore and create pro-d initiatives like the student conference and the [teacher] literacy conference.”

Participant Driven Learning
Several study group members talked about the importance of the study group having a clear focus but working together to ensure that the focus changed with the changing needs of the group. The importance of the group remaining fresh and member directed was very much a priority. For example one teacher wrote, “Allow the membership to select topics/ideas and make the decisions,” while another teacher similarly commented, “Remind them that study groups are member directed and not based on top-down direction. I think we are used to having pro-d ‘done’ to us and not participating actively.”

After a year of participating in the study group, Joey commented that he probably would not have returned for a second year if the structure had remained the same, and he was pleased
that the members were the ones to decide on the following year’s focus. Joey explained:

I think this year, well having that resource was great cause it was, it wasn’t a program you had to follow from the first page to the last page, everybody did it in a different order but it was, I think that was a great next step, a good idea. I was really excited in June last year to have, you know, we’re thinking of a resource, or does anyone have any ideas, or this is our thing for next year. So, having a thing was great. You know I think if it was another year of the same thing that might have... I think it was good when we meet again this June to have another new thing, or new idea, or slightly new direction or something. We can always revert back to, you know this month we don’t have anything on the go so bring what your working on, or bring some challenges, or bring some questions and just, you know, we’ll bounce it around and see what, you know. That would be okay, like to go back to the roots, once in a while but also to keep the group progressing forward. Every year being fresh. So if it’s a new resource or something that we’re fortunate enough to get our hands on or um, something. Some new direction. I don’t know if I have the idea, but I hope somebody does. But just that we do something, I think that will keep me coming.

In sum, the direction of the group needs to remain in touch with the group’s needs and should be determined by the group. The comparison group did not mention items related to participant driven study groups.

Priorities of Professional Development and Their Existence in The Study Group

For each of the 22 likert questions, respondents rated the priority of the item and then rated
Table 14

Means and Standard Deviations of Ratings of Importance and Existence for Each of the Six Groupings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grouping</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Importance Rating</th>
<th>Existence Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n    M    SD</td>
<td>n    M    SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26    4.81 0.49</td>
<td>26    4.58 0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26    4.69 0.62</td>
<td>26    4.73 0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26    4.54 0.81</td>
<td>26    4.65 0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25    4.36 0.76</td>
<td>25    4.60 0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26    4.69 0.62</td>
<td>25    4.92 0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Inquiry/</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26    4.77 0.43</td>
<td>26    3.73 1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26    4.58 0.50</td>
<td>26    3.85 1.05</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26    3.92 1.06</td>
<td>26    3.19 1.39</td>
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<td>Career Path</td>
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<td>25    3.84 0.99</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Peer Learning</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26    3.27 1.00</td>
<td>26    4.15 1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26    3.38 0.98</td>
<td>26    2.19 1.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The 22 Likert questions were presented in the six groupings explained earlier in the chapter to allow for a thematic discussion of the comparison between how important the question was rated by study group respondents and the degree in which it exists in the group. n refers to number of study group participants who responded.

the degree to which it existed in their study group. The mean scores and standard deviations of the 22 questions are presented in their six thematic groupings in Table 14.

Learning Culture

Study group members valued the learning culture of a professional development experience
and overall, this value was met. With the exception of question four, opportunities to collaborate, all existence ratings are greater than the importance ratings, suggesting that for the most part, study group members participate in or work to create a group where their priorities are met. In the case of question four, there is a small difference between the importance and existence ratings (.23) and the standard deviation for the existence rating is higher, suggesting that the lower score is a result of more variability with the scores than an overall consensus that collaboration does not exist in the group. Responses made by the two secondary interviewees, Erica and Kelly, suggest that the lower scores may come from them.

Critical Inquiry/Application

As Table 14 shows, two of the three questions in the Critical Inquiry/Application group, examining beliefs (Q2) (M=4.77) and making connections between theory and practice (Q3) (M=4.58), were important to study group members, more so than the third question, providing hands-on support (Q9) (M=3.92). As seen in Table 10, examining beliefs and connecting practice with theory were also ranked in the top five priorities by 56 percent and 32 percent of study group members. The existence ratings of these two aspects of professional development do not correspond with their importance ratings as can be seen in Table 14. Thus, the study group membership, though they valued examining beliefs and making theory to practice connections, were not experiencing that reality at a high level.

Career Path

One of the highest means for the importance ratings was question seven (M = 4.81), the opportunity to reflect on practice. Similar to examining beliefs (Q2) and connecting theory to
practice (Q3), the mean \( M = 4.38 \) for opportunities to reflect on practice (Q7) was less than the importance rating. The group, it would appear, provided for reflection but perhaps could build in more time for this highly valued practice. The existence of self-directed professional development (Q16) appears to be high in the study group. But there are a few members who perceive themselves not having total choice over the direction of their learning; not shown in Table 14, four percent of respondents rated the opportunity to be self-directed and chose personally meaningful professional development (Q16) as low on the likert scale, and 12 percent rated it as medium. Only nine percent of the study group members felt that the degree this element of choice exists was high.

Relevance

The study group members placed a high importance on professional development that was relevant \( M = 4.06 \), see Table 8, and Table 14 reveals that this study group provided a learning climate that had a direct bearing on practice (Q22), involved sharing classroom work (Q1), and helped members to develop a repertoire of strategies and lessons (Q21). Opportunities to examine student work (Q25) \( M = 3.76 \) and integrate learning into daily life at school (A31) \( M = 3.42 \) were not occurring as frequently as the other three elements of professional development just mentioned, but they were also valued less than the others.

Content/Methods

The mean existence ratings for the Content-Methods grouping were 3.27, 3.68, and 3.75 for questions six, twelve, and twenty-four respectively. These means are similar to the importance ratings for each question: 3.42, 3.92, and 4.12. The large standard deviations that
accompany each of the three means suggest that the members ranged in their perceptions of each item's existence in the group, but overall the value and existence ratings are compatible.

Peer Learning

The opportunity to present, lead discussions, and/or publish (Q13) had the lowest mean score for importance rating of all 22 questions listed in Table 14. Its mean importance rating ($M = 3.27$) is lower than its existence ($M = 4.15$) in the group, suggesting that the opportunities for peer leadership are available but not as highly valued as other aspects of professional development. The larger standard deviations suggest some variability in scores, so this finding is cautiously interpreted.

Conclusion

Several conclusions can be drawn from the data presented in this study. First, there do not appear to be any discernable gender differences although there may be some indication that females place a higher value on a trusting learning environment and the option to work alone. Study groups appear to attract a less experienced teacher and these teachers seem to be more interested in inquiry-based than in practical professional development. Another difference noted with the years of experience demographic was the trend for value toward Career Path to increase during the middle years of one’s career and then decrease in the final part of one’s career. There are no major differences between elementary and secondary teachers but secondary teachers surveyed rate the value of a trusting and supportive learning environment higher than elementary teachers do.
Both study group and comparison groups reveal themselves to be professionally active. Around 60 percent of study group members reported attending all the meetings, even though interview data show some dissatisfaction with members who do not consistently attend. The comparison group was also unexpectedly active – 68 percent attend their own study group.

The data converge to support the finding that overall, the Learning Culture of a professional development experience is the most important element. After Culture, items measuring Critical Inquiry and Career Path were the next most highly valued elements in professional development. This in no way means the other elements in the other four groupings were not valued, as high mean scores above the mid-point on the likert scale, and individual priority rankings, show that all the elements were still valued by participants. The study group did, however, rate all six groupings higher than the comparison group participants, and whereas study group members highly valued both examining beliefs and theory-practice connections, the comparison group notably valued examining beliefs more so than theory-practice connections.

Finally, overall the importance ratings and existence ratings by study group members were quite compatible. There were two exceptions. First, study group members rate opportunities to engage in critical inquiry and reflect on practice as very important. The existence ratings for these elements were lower than their importance ratings.
Generalizability

The generalizability of the findings presented in this chapter are limited to similar study groups of teachers of elementary and secondary English or Language Arts. These findings do appear to be consistent with the literature on effective professional development, and as such, the findings could more generally apply to teachers and other professionals, such as engineers and doctors, working in professional development.

A limitation of this study is its ability to make between-group generalizations; the comparison group was not randomly selected and two-thirds of the teachers reported attending another study group. Despite the large number of comparison group participants who had attended a study group, there were still differences between the study and comparison groups.
Substantial research initiatives have been directed toward understanding best practice in teacher professional development (Fullan, 2001) and this commitment has resulted in a shared understanding that some characteristics of professional development are more effective at creating lasting and meaningful change than others (Hawley & Valli, 1999). Highly effective professional development is rooted in best available research, is school-based (AFT, 2002), actively engages teachers (Hawley & Valli, 1999; Little, 1993), is ongoing and supported (Fullan, 2001), is collaborative and collegial, builds on teacher expertise (Hawley & Valli, 1999), is practical (Elmore & Burney, 1999) and inquiry based (Andres & Richardson, 1994), and is part of a comprehensive change process (Little, 1993; Fullan, 2001). Additionally, meaningful teacher professional development responds to gaps in student performance (Hawley & Valli, 1999).

Underlying all professional development is the need for teacher learning to be an ongoing and collaborative process (Hawley & Valli, 1999). Teachers in my study, in particular those attending the study group, were more likely to give a higher value rating to the presence of a collaborative, collegial, and supportive Learning Culture, than to other components of professional development. This is not to suggest that participants did not value the other elements of professional development, as all six components had mean scores above the midpoint on the likert scale.
The findings of the current study indicate teacher values that are aligned with the ten characteristics of professional development outlined in the literature presented in Chapter II. The current study also provides insight into why teachers may value certain elements, such as *Learning Culture*, over others, like *Peer Learning*. Throughout the chapter, some differences between gender, years teaching experience, grade level, and study and comparison groups will be discussed. In addition, the findings from the current study have implications for practice such as suggestions for developing collegiality, and providing time for both sharing and critical inquiry. The findings also provide new directions for future research such as exploring differences in needs and values between beginning and veteran teachers.

Isolation and Collaboration

The *Learning Culture* – collaboration, collegiality, shared interests, and member expertise – of a professional development experience is the top priority for teachers in the current study. Norms of isolation, institutionalized in most schools, foster teacher uncertainty (Lortie, 2002). There is evidence, however, that teachers who work in collaborative and collegial settings reap benefits such as increased work certainty, shared technical culture, high commitment to ongoing and collective learning (Rosenholtz, 1991) and the opportunity to work in a supportive, social, motivating, dynamic and innovative atmosphere (McLaughlin, 1993). In the current study, collaboration (Q4) ranked in the top five priorities more consistently than any other characteristic of professional development included on the survey (Appendices B, D, F), for both study (64 percent) and comparison (47 percent) group participants. Sharing classroom anecdotes, lesson plans, and strategies (Q1) was also ranked
in the top five by 44 percent of study group, and 41 percent of comparison group participants. Open-ended data also indicate that participants value the opportunity to talk with other teachers – to explore ideas and theories and share successes and failures. Lortie (2002) reports that teachers, despite preferences to work alone, consider other teachers their best source of new ideas. In the current study, teachers quite clearly favour professional development that is collaborative, and as with Lortie (2002), they do value each other as a good source of ideas.

Probably one of the most unexpected findings in the current study was the low priority, especially by study group participants, attributed to professional development that recognizes and capitalizes on teachers’ knowledge and skills (Q19). It is surprising that teachers would rate collaboration between peers highly and then the recognition of peer expertise much lower. The explanation that makes the most sense is that the wording of the question was unclear, perhaps a bit too formal.

Development of Common Technical Culture

One possible reason for teachers placing such high importance on collaboration and sharing of strategies and ideas may be the access it provides them to a developing technical culture. Teachers who work in schools with norms of collaboration and shared goals are more certain in their work (Rosenholtz, 1991). According to Lortie (2002), the importance of this cannot be underestimated; without a common technical culture, teachers experience uncertainty. The open-ended data from the study group indicate the exchange of ideas, strategies, and experiences contributed to the development of a shared group technical culture. Some study
group teachers indicate an increased confidence in their teaching from participating in the study group. For example, one teacher wrote “I feel much more confident in the quality of my program.” This is because, as teachers explained it, they have access to what others are trying – one teacher values the ability “…to see what others do and thereby have a sense of how my own development as a teacher is progressing.” In sum, study group participants value access to other teachers because it allows them to see what other teachers are doing - to get feedback and to get validation for their work.

Not reported in the literature I reviewed were the benefits of mixing grade levels, schools, and positions. The membership of this study group spanned grades four through twelve and included both classroom teachers and resource teachers, plus administrators, consultants, and a professor from a local university. Several members reported that the variety in membership is a major strength in the group; it helps teachers to appreciate the spectrum of learning expectations and teaching styles students will encounter.

Type of Collaboration – Sharing Versus Inquiry

Research suggests that most types of collaboration between teachers are of the sharing sort – exchanging ‘tricks of the trade’ (Lortie, 2002) – but in schools where collaboration is the norm, teachers more frequently engage in instructional problem-solving and planning (Rosenholtz, 1991). In the current study, teachers appeared to value both types of collaboration, but perhaps to varying extents. Critical Inquiry was very important to teachers in this study; it was the second highest mean score and it was statistically higher than the Content/Methods and Career Path groupings. Both study (56 percent) and comparison (29
percent) group participants ranked the opportunity to examine beliefs about teaching and learning (Q2) as a top five priority. Thirty-two percent of study group participants also rank the opportunity to make connections between theory and practice (Q3) as a top five priority (only six percent of comparison group participants ranked it in the top five). Thus, teachers in this study appear to value a complex interaction that requires them to think critically (Birchak et al., 1998; Richardson, 2003).

Opportunities to share anecdotes, lesson plans, and strategies (Q1) are also important to both study and comparison group participants. This element of professional development is ranked in the top five by 44 percent, and 41 percent of study and comparison group participants respectively. It would seem that both types of learning –sharing and inquiry– are important. Perhaps it is not so much a matter of either/or, but rather, as Birchak et al. (1998) note, finding a balance between the two.

The data suggest, however, that the study group may be working toward striking a better balance between sharing and critical inquiry. Study group members were likely satisfied with the amount of sharing in the group (Q1); the existence rating (M=4.73) for sharing was slightly higher than the importance rating (M=4.65). But the opportunities to engage in examining beliefs (Q2) (M=3.73) and making theory-practice connections (Q3) (M=3.85) were low compared to their respective importance ratings, M=4.77 and M=4.58. Value for critical inquiry was corroborated by the multiple references to critical inquiry in their general values for professional development. But what is interesting is that not one study group member, when asked to write what they specifically valued about the study group, wrote
about critical inquiry. It is difficult to determine from the current study how much of a concern this is for members. Two interviewees desire more theoretically rooted debate, but it is not clear whether the majority of members felt the same way. It does seem possible, however.

Importance of Collegial and Supportive Learning Environment

Collegial relations and a supportive learning environment were valuable components of a professional development experience to both study and comparison group teachers. Collaboration, interestingly, scored much higher in the top five priority rankings than collegiality; collaboration was the most frequently ranked top five priority overall. It is possible that the outcomes of collaboration – a shared technical culture and increased teacher certainty (Rosenholtz, 1991) – are more important than establishing friendships with other teachers. It is also possible that collegiality is more important for some study group members than it is for others. The open-ended data suggest this.

It is also interesting that although comparison group teachers ranked collegiality (Q18) and a safe and supportive learning environment (Q15) just slightly higher than study group participants, they minimally wrote about the value of these characteristics in the open-ended section of the survey. This is in contrast to study group teachers who wrote comparatively more about the benefit of a collegial, supportive, and safe learning environment. It is possible that study group members’ current participation in the study group made these aspects of professional development more relevant to them compared to comparison group participants, who may not have recently experienced a friendly and safe learning atmosphere.
The open-ended responses by the study group indicated that teachers are more willing to take risks when they feel safe. One teacher stated “I want the experience to feel safe. I do not want to feel condescended to. If I feel that there is respect from all group members I am willing to take a risk. I look for support and understanding from my colleagues.” Joyce et al. (1989) and Rosenholtz (1991) suggest that teachers avoid collaboration for fear the experience might expose their professional inadequacies. While there are no specific references by participants to this type of avoidance, teachers in the study group stress how important it is for them to collaborate in a safe and supportive learning environment. The establishment of a strong community takes time (Hawley & Valli, 1999) and before teachers in the current study will willingly and safely engage in critical inquiry together, they need to be able to trust one another.

Building collegiality takes time (Hawley & Valli, 1999) and the willingness of members to get to know each other by sharing both their work and the ups and downs of teaching (Birchak et al., 1998). Some study group members discussed how the ongoing meetings allowed them to build relationships that would not have been possible in a one-day workshop; however, not everyone reported close collegial relations with all members of the group. Interview data revealed that some teachers felt more collegial toward certain members than others due to factors such as sitting with the same colleagues each week, the increasing size of the group, and inconsistent commitment by some members. This, according to one interviewee, limited the group from being able to safely challenge one another – “I don’t know if the group is really air tight to really banter ideas – to really argue with each other.”
This has implications for the ability of the group to challenge beliefs and debate theory, a critical element of changing a teacher’s practice (Fullan, 2001).

Rewards and Motivation

Considering the increasing demands of teacher workload (Fullan, 2001), it is not surprisingly that study group participants in the current study discuss the benefit of establishing a network of professionals to provide both professional and personal support. According to McDonald (1986) this is especially important because “…talking together might offer some protection for our energy and ideals in the face of changing times” (p. 357). Working collectively increases professional respect for colleagues (Birchak et al., 1998), has the reported benefit of increasing desire to learn (Florio-Ruane & Raphael, 2001), and provides a motivating and innovative work environment (McLaughlin, 1993). The teachers in the study group described a high respect for other members of the group and the inspiration they felt as a result of working with other passionate and capable teachers. For many study group participants, it is a welcome experience to work with colleagues who are similarly passionate about, and commitment to improving their practice. For various reasons (see Hargreaves, 1994; Rosenholtz, 1991), some teachers avoid collaboration, but for teachers who value collaboration, schools can be isolating. It is not surprising that the study group members find the presence of motivated and hard-working teachers, committing monthly to develop their craft, both refreshing and invigorating. It is likely a sharp contrast to their schools (as described by Lortie, 2002).
A conundrum exists for teachers in this study; teachers value ongoing learning but the demands of their work (Fullan, 2001) leave little available time to commit to something on a monthly basis. This was especially emphasized by the comparison group teachers. Several of them indicated they would be interested in attending a monthly study group but their greatest barrier was time.

One solution to the time barrier is to carve time into the daily work schedule for teachers to collaborate. The American Federation of Teachers (2002) states that effective professional development is site-based and job embedded. But teachers in the current study rated professional development integrated into daily life at school a much lower priority than other characteristics; only four percent (n=1) of study group participants, and zero percent of comparison group participants ranked it as a top five priority. This is consistent with Lortie’s (2002) finding that teachers, even when provided additional time, will choose to work alone, rather than collaborate. Another site-based characteristic, hands-on support in the classroom (Q9), was also ranked low. Hargreaves (1994) explains that teachers’ preference for individualism is a strategic move by teachers to cope with their demanding workload – teachers remain classroom centered in order to keep up with daily responsibilities and cope with both classroom and external pressures. The current study demonstrates more support for Hargreaves’ (1994) explanation of individualism than it does for Rosenholtz’s (1991) theory of avoiding threats to one’s self-esteem. Teachers in the current study indicated that they
value ongoing learning, more so than short-term commitments, but find it challenging to make the time for it.

The current study also reveals that value for school-directed professional development is lower compared to elements such as self-directed learning. None of the study group members ranked school directed professional development where staffs work on meeting school goals (Q17) as a top five priority, and only six percent (n=1) of comparison group teachers ranked it in the top five. This could be interpreted as resistance to school collaboration, but the data reveal participants in the current study to highly value collaboration. There are three other, more likely explanations.

First, teachers value the ability to choose learning that is most meaningful to them. Career Path was the second highest mean and statistically higher than Content/Methods and Peer Learning ($t(43) = 3.041, p=.004$). Teachers value the opportunity to reflect on their practice and make decisions about their learning that will be most relevant to them.

The second explanation is based on Hargreaves' (1994) explanation of why some teachers resist school-based collaboration. He explains that teachers' commitment to, or moral obligation to care for their students, means teachers will take ownership and control of their classrooms in order to provide what they perceive to be the best program for their students. Taking teachers out of the classroom for release time and replacing them with temporary teachers is perceived by many teachers as a disruption to the quality program they offer. This commitment to provide 'the best' program possible may motivate teachers to select
professional development that will, in their view, help them best meet the needs of their classroom. For school-directed professional development to be meaningful to teachers in the current study, it would be helpful if it can address the relevant needs of both teachers and of their classrooms. The open-ended data indicate that teachers in the study group valued professional development that they could see directly benefiting their students while also being professionally relevant to them.

The third explanation for lower scores for items relating to school based professional development relates to comments made by study group members in the short answer and interview sections. As reported by study group members, they valued knowing that the other teachers attending the study group were similarly excited and motivated to be there. In their research of teacher study groups, Joyce, et al. (1989) report that during the initial stages of implementing school-based study groups there is a certain amount of expressed skepticism and pessimism by some staff. They also report that success by some teachers has little inspirational effect on other staff members. It is understandable then, why study group teachers said it was refreshing to attend professional development where everyone had chosen to be there.

Relevance

As professional development shifts from atheoretical, transmission frameworks toward more theoretical, collaborative ones (Hawley & Valli, 1999), it is still important to provide relevant and practical professional development (Elmore & Burney, 1999; AFT, 2002). Relevant
professional development was a priority for all participants (M=4.06) despite the mean score for the Relevance grouping being only fourth highest; the only grouping statistically higher was Learning Culture. The open-ended data provide several examples of teachers' valuing the sharing of lessons and strategies and taking back lessons that could be used in the classroom.

The Content/Methods grouping (M=3.75), however, ranked statistically lower than Learning Culture (M=4.43), Critical Inquiry/Application (M=4.22), and Career Path (M=4.17) for all participants, and within the study group, it was also statistically less important than the Relevance grouping (M=3.77 versus M=4.19). Not only are workshops or in-services that function to train teachers for implementation seen as less effective (Fullan, 2001; Richardson, 2003), but they are valued less by teachers in this study compared to other elements of professional development such as making theory-practice connections. It is worth noting, however, that some comparison group teachers did remark on the value of having the chance to practice a strategy before returning to their classrooms, whereas this was not even discussed by study group members. It would be worthwhile for research to determine where and when teachers would find it helpful to have the opportunity to increase their content and methodological knowledge and skills.

Participant Driven

Effective professional development engages teachers in identifying the learning goals, and when possible, in being a part of developing the learning process. A defining characteristic of
study groups is that they are member-driven (Sanacore, 1993). In the current study, study group participants appreciated the grassroots nature of the group and valued the ownership they felt over their learning. To disregard the role of teachers in their own professional development is to insult their professionalism (Clark & Florio-Ruane, 2001). As the group grows in size it will need to find ways to involve all members in the direction the learning takes.

Peer Learning

_Peer Learning_ (M=3.31) was the lowest mean score for the whole sample, and within both the study and comparison groups. This result, especially from study group participants, is a little surprising given the amount of sharing that occurred in the study group and the opportunities that were also available to present formally. This does not mean it is not valued, as the mean ranking was 3.33 on a 5-point scale, but teachers did not place the same importance on increasing their leadership opportunities as they did the other components. Some teachers, however, did comment that they benefited from having the opportunities to present in the group. For some, having the chance to present is professionally valuable, but it is not an overall group priority.

Commitment

Both study and comparison group participants were active professionally in long-term learning. In the study group 80 percent of surveys returned indicated that members attended
most of the meetings, and 68 percent of the comparison group reported attending a study

group other than the one referenced in this study. This is interesting given that several
teachers in the comparison group commented how little time members felt they had to attend
an ongoing study group. For example, one teacher, when asked if he or she would participate
in a study group, wrote, “Yes, I love to explore ideas in a trusting atmosphere where there is
time to get to the core of an issue and reflect. The only problem is TIME. Already feel
strapped for time.”

Demographic Findings

In addition to the major findings, there are also some differences between sub-groups.

By Gender

No significant gender differences were found, but given the small sample size of males, it is
possible that there was not enough statistical power to detect a difference. It is possible that
females place higher importance in a trusting and supportive environment (Q15) than males.
This could have implications for a district where 70 percent of its continuing contract
teachers (not on leave) are female (Demographic Information from July 12, 2004 provided by
the district).

By Years Experience

In my study, more teachers early in their careers (0-10 years) attend study groups than more
experienced teachers do. In the study group, 54 percent are teachers with 0-10 years experience and 46 percent of the comparison teachers who attend another study group are also in their first 10 years of teaching. In my study more experienced teachers do attend study groups but the current study found teachers with less experience attending more. The literature reviewed in Chapter II does not mention a demographic difference in study group attendance, but Lortie, (2002) did find that beginning teachers preferred teachers closest in rank as their source of ideas and feedback. Moreover, given that beginning teachers share the same responsibility as veteran teachers and there is limited on-the-job-support and sharing (Lortie, 2002), it is not surprising that the youngest in the teaching force want to come together with other teachers in similar situations where they can safely ask their questions (Birchak et al., 1998) and build their technical repertories (Lortie, 2002).

Another difference between years experience groups was found. Although all three groups placed high priorities on reflection and collaboration, a trend of declining importance on the value of critical inquiry was found as teachers gained in years teaching experience. This trend is seen by comparing mean differences of the Critical Inquiry grouping and with the rankings of the top five priorities. It was surprising to find that the top five most ranked priorities by the least experienced teachers related to collaboration, collegiality, critical inquiry, and reflection, and not take-home strategies and lessons. It makes sense that teachers early in their careers would want to seek out collegial and collaborative support given that the demands of being a practicing teacher in today’s schools are high (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 2001) and it is fathomable that is only compounded for beginning teachers. But these teachers would have a smaller repertoire of strategies and lessons to pull from
compared to their more experienced colleagues, and so it is interesting that teachers early in
their careers preferred critical inquiry over a lesson that they could use the next day. Perhaps,
the more experienced teachers, who still value collaboration and reflection, have had time to
establish their beliefs, investigate theory, and build up a network of support. More
experienced teachers then are more interested in finding new and exciting ways to teach,
rather than investigating the theory behind the teaching.

What is perhaps less clear is the inverted U-shaped pattern that emerged with the Career Path
mean scores. Teachers in the middle group (11-20 years experience) had the highest overall
mean score for this grouping. Perhaps after the first 10 years of teaching, teachers have
developed a strong idea of their strengths, weaknesses, and interests, and value the
opportunity to determine their own path of professional development. It is more likely,
however, that a small sample size, in particular with the two more experienced groups, makes
these findings less reliable.

By Grade Level

Elementary and secondary teachers similarly valued collaboration, sharing, and examining
beliefs; however, it is possible that secondary teachers may place a higher priority on Critical
Inquiry. Both secondary interviewees would like to see the study group build in more time
for theoretical debate of ideas. The only literature relevant to this possible trend is in
McDonald (1986) where secondary teachers readily debated and published positions on
educational theory and policy. Why this trend might exist is unclear.
An interesting finding, perhaps somewhat unexpected, was that a collegial (30 percent) and trusting (40 percent) learning environment was a top five priority for several secondary teachers, whereas it was not in the five top priorities for elementary teachers. Interview data with the two secondary teachers’ data were able to shed light on this finding; both teachers commented that some secondary teachers find teaching very isolating, and one remarked that secondary teachers are not as positive about professional development as elementary teachers appear to be. One secondary teacher suggests that elementary schools are more positive and she likes having these teachers as part of her group for that reason.

By Group

Garet et al. (2001) examine the effects of different characteristics of professional development as measured by teachers’ self-reported increases in knowledge and skill and changes in practice. Their findings have implications for differences observed between study and comparison groups in the current study because the participants from Garet et al. (2001) were engaged in both traditional and reform professional development. Their findings suggest that it is not the type of activity – reform or traditional – that matters so much, but rather its duration. Garet et al. (2001) examined the effects of different characteristics of professional development measured by teachers’ self-reported increases in knowledge and skills, and changes in practice. They found that reform activities (eg., study groups) tended to have increased reports of these items except when duration was controlled for. Traditional and reform participants tended to report similar outcomes when duration was similar (Garet et al., 2001). The results from my study indicate a similar pattern to Garet et al. (2001)
between the current study and comparison groups. First, the mean ratings for all six groupings were higher for study group members. Second, there was more agreement by study group members in their values. For example, even though the study and comparison groups ranked similar items in the priority rankings – both rated sharing (Q1), examining beliefs (Q2), and collaboration (Q4) in their five top five priorities – more study group members consistently ranked those items in the top five priorities. The same pattern is found with mean scores for ongoing professional development. Both groups ranked it higher than short-term learning, but study group members (M=4.00) ranked it higher than comparison group (M=3.37) teachers. Thus, it appears that it is not so much a matter of valuing strikingly different characteristics of professional development, but rather a possible difference between the two groups is one of ‘more’.

Two exceptions to this pattern appear to be the Career Path grouping and the single Likert question three: the opportunity to make theory-practice connections. It is not clear why study group members ranked Career Path statistically higher than comparison group teachers. It is interesting that statistically significant differences are found between the Career Path (t(43) = 3.041, p≤.01) and Learning Culture t(43)=2.871, p≤.01) groupings, but not with the Critical Inquiry/Application (t(43)=2.203, p≥.01) grouping. Priority ratings by comparison group members suggest they value items that comprise the Learning Culture grouping, just not as much as study group members. So in this specific case, the argument of ‘more’ still applies. It is also possible that either the study group attracted a particular group of teachers who rank Learning Culture higher than most teachers, or after participating in a group where a strong culture existed, members came to value this more.
Finally, there does seem to be a difference between the groups in the value of making theory-practice connections. Whereas thirty-two percent of study group members ranked making connections between theory and practice (Q3) as one of their five top priorities, this same item was ranked by only 6 percent (n=1) of comparison group participants. Open-ended data also reflect this trend; comparison group teachers value relevant and practical professional development, more so than theoretical.

Implications for Practice

The findings from the current study have several implications for developing best practice in schools and in school districts. First, the *Learning Culture* of the group was arguably the most valued component of the professional development experience. Traditional, delivery-models of professional in-service, as described by Hawley and Valli, (1999), would overlook the most important aspect of learning to teachers - the opportunity to learn within a collaborative, collegial, trusting and supportive environment with other teachers who share a common interest. Educators involved in the organization and planning of professional development must look for ways to provide teachers a strong learning culture to learn in. The benefits reported by current study group members support this suggestion.

Second, it would be valuable to some teachers, as part of their overall professional development plan, to have access to regular and long-term learning opportunities. Teachers in the study group said that attending monthly meetings provided a focus in their learning
and consequently they were able to make changes in their practice. One-time workshops do not provide teachers the time needed to make meaning of their learning (Fullan, 2001) and this is why opportunities to engage in long-term learning, as a compliment to workshops, would be beneficial. In addition, the ongoing opportunities provided members the chance to build relationships and establish a culture of trust and encouragement. Teachers in the current study group report that because they feel safe and supported, they are willing to take risks in their learning.

Third, teaching can be a thankless job (Fullan, 2001) and teachers can serve not only to support one another but to inspire and motivate each other to become master teachers. Teachers can benefit from time to talk, share, and inquire together, not only for the obvious practical exchange of lessons and ideas that occurs, but also because coming together with other passionate and knowledgeable people has the wonderful outcome invigorating teachers (McLaughlin, 1993). Open-ended data from study group teachers in the current study support this recommendation.

Fourth, as teachers begin to have increasing access to professional development that aims to value, develop, and harness the expertise of its participants, it would be helpful if facilitators and participants recognize that initially, not all members will confidently jump in and share, nor perceive themselves as having anything worthy of sharing. Interviewee data from some study group members suggest that it took some time to build up confidence to share. Facilitators of the learning will need to be sensitive to that and build a culture where all voices are welcome.
What teachers need to know has increased (Fullan, 1994), and what they are expected to do has become more complex (Hawley & Valli, 1999; Holm & Horn, 2003); thus, it is not surprising that teachers in this study valued professional development that provides opportunities to reflect, examine their beliefs and make connections between theory and practice. Teachers, as was seen in my study, value the opportunity to deepen their understanding of what good practice is. “Make and take” lessons are fun – at times useful – but not the first priority of some teachers. Meaningful professional development will need to reflect the intellectual needs and abilities of teachers. This may mean, as Erica, one of the secondary interviewees describes it, changing the way professional development is marketed. Clearly teachers in this study are interested in engaging at a deep level; professional development needs to honour the theoretician in all teachers (McDonald, 1986).

Finally, the teachers in the study group are inspiring; they commit once a month to a study group and between meetings, read related educational material and try things out in their classrooms, all in the pursuit of becoming a master teacher. Not all teachers will be willing to do this, as was noted by comments made by comparison group teachers. If school districts want to see changes in teacher beliefs, teacher practice, and ultimately student achievement, teachers must be given time during school hours to engage in on-going, collaborative, inquiry-based learning. If school districts want to see changes in teacher beliefs, teacher practice, and ultimately student achievement, more time can be given time during school hours to engage in on-going, collaborative, inquiry-based learning. But more time is not a silver bullet solution. To effectively establish school-based collaboration each school needs
to consider how to make getting together physically possible (eg., friendly workspace) (Lortie, 2002) and find out what learning is relevant to staff. Furthermore, to increase commitment to collaboration, schools can address the impact of increased workload, otherwise several teachers, as Hargreaves (1994) notes, will chose to avoid additional work, even if they know it is beneficial for them. Finally, school-based professional development may face resistance from staff, as was found in Joyce et al. (1989). To address this dilemma in detail is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, it would make for fascinating future research.

Implications for the Study Group

The data from the study group indicate the existence of a community of learners who are committed to bettering their practice. These teachers value the opportunities the group provides for collaboration, reflection, inquiry and exchange of ideas. Many feel they have improved as teachers and some report their students benefiting as well. Sustaining membership on an ongoing basis is achieved by the study group because for the most part, the learning priorities of the group are being met. Members who were no longer attending on a regular basis did so because of personal circumstances, and furthermore, the differences between the study group’s importance and existence ratings were usually minor. There are some notable exceptions.
First, it is possible that the group would like more opportunities to examine beliefs and make connections between theory and practice. Both of these items were highly valued but the mean ratings for the extent that teachers have access to these opportunities was lower.

Second, the group should continue to build the strong and vibrant learning culture that members have come to value so much. Given the growing membership, however, it would be helpful to find ways to keep the members connected. Teachers acknowledged that although the group as a whole was friendly, some members felt more connected with some teachers than others. It might be helpful at times to provide an activity where groups are shuffled around a bit and people get to know new faces. For some members, attendance was a concern. Balancing the need to have regular attendance in order to establish relationships, with the understanding that teachers are busy, is challenging. Finding creative ways, in addition to the on-going discussions and sharing, to bring members together might be helpful. Probably the most simple thing, and yet sometimes, the most overlooked, is to make sure everyone knows everyone else’s name, even if it means wearing name tags.

Finally, choosing professional development that is personally meaningful was highly valued by study group teachers but not all members agreed that elements of choice existed in the group. It is not clear whether these members want a more active role in the decision making processes, so it would be helpful to first determine that. Next, the group needs to reflect on how it will remain in touch with the needs of its members as group grows in size.
Implications for Research

The small representation of males in this study made it difficult to detect and then interpret with any confidence gender differences in learning preferences. Other research has reported gender differences in conversation style (Florio-Ruane & Raphael, 2001). The current study did show a slight trend where females rated a trusting and supportive environment more important than males did. As noted earlier, the bulk of the teachers in the district where this study took place are female. If gender differences do in fact exist, it could have implications for designing professional development.

Similarly, two findings from this study raise the question as to whether teachers at different points in their career prefer different types of professional development. First, a trend of declining importance for critical inquiry was found as teachers increase in teaching experience. Originally there were five years experience categories that were collapsed into three in order to increase power during statistical analysis. The least experienced teachers placed the greatest importance on critical inquiry and collegiality, and not on teaching strategies and lessons that could be used in their classrooms, which I found somewhat surprising. I think that if this research were done again with the original five categories, different results might be found with teachers in their first five years experience.

Second, it may be that study groups are more likely to attract less experienced teachers. What is it about a study group that would appeal to teachers closer to the beginning of their careers? Do teachers with 21 or more years experience, nearing the end of their careers, find
more value in certain types of professional development than others? Repeating this study with a larger and more random sample would perhaps help determine whether there are indeed any differences related to experience.

Furthermore, are there differences in priorities between elementary and secondary teachers? The secondary teachers in the study showed a trend to value critical inquiry more than the elementary teachers. A new study, again drawing on a larger sample, could provide some insight into this.

Study groups are a compliment, not a replacement to other forms of professional development (Sanacore, 1993). Teachers in this study highly valued characteristics of learning that are also defining characteristics of study groups. This does not mean, however, that collaborative activities such as study groups are the most appropriate venue for all kinds of learning. For example, teachers in the study group did not mention valuing collegiality when asked to describe their values of professional development in general. Future research could examine where and when study groups are perceived to be effective, where and when teachers prefer the "black-listed" one-shot workshop, and what characteristics teachers expect out of varying types of professional development. On that same note, future research could also examine individualism in schools, and seek to understand the role of both collaboration and individualism, perhaps as compliments rather than as mutually exclusive options.
Finally, the small sample size made a factor analysis less reliable and as such the six groupings were conceptually developed and tested using multiple correlations and cronbach's alpha. Future research could either use the same questions and compare new groupings with my own, or include a large enough sample to conduct a factor analysis and then compare new factors with my groupings. This would help to determine the reliability and validating of the groupings.

Conclusions

Teachers in the current study value a variety of elements of professional development, but their top priority is the *Learning Culture* of a professional development experience. This finding has implications for planning professional development because it shows that these teachers place a greater importance on the environmental conditions in which they learn compared to the 'make-and-take' strategies and lessons they are taught, a component typically emphasized by traditional professional development (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). The teachers in this study, unlike those described in Lortie (2002), and the resistors in Joyce et al. (1989), would most likely welcome additional time for collaborative opportunities.

Furthermore, teachers in the current study are motivated to engage in *Critical Inquiry*, a much lauded characteristic of effective professional development (Andres & Richardson, 1994; Fullan, 2001; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Richardson, 2003). Nevertheless the findings do
not suggest emphasis placed on critical inquiry in professional development should replace practical and short-term learning (Hawley & Valli, 1999).

Finally, some differences may exist between gender, years teaching experience, and grade level. All of these raise questions for future research. Additionally, if differences between teachers who do and do not attend the current study group are attributable more to duration, and not type of activity, this has implications for research that views traditional professional development, such as the workshop, as less effective (Fullan, 2001). It would also mean that teachers, administrators, and district staff responsible for planning professional development need to focus more on how to provide teachers time to commit to their learning, and not so much on whether the activity is a workshop or a study group (Garet et al., 2001). In sum, teachers in this study value a range of characteristics in professional development but seem to particularly appreciate Learning Culture, Critical Inquiry/Application, and Career Path. The current study shows that a study group can be a powerful instrument in teachers’ professional development and potentially, as the literature demonstrates, a means to increase student achievement (Joyce et al., 1989). It does not however, claim that study groups, or more broadly, collaboration, are the only paths to improved teacher and student performance, but it does reinforce the effectiveness and value of characteristics such collaboration, collegiality, critical inquiry, and reflection, that study groups readily provide.
References


American Federation of Teachers, (2002). *Principles for professional development: AFT's guidelines for creating professional development programs that make a difference*. Washington, D.C.


Clark, C. M., & Florio-Ruane, S. (2001). Conversation as support for teaching in new


Joyce, B., Murphy, C., Showers, B., & Murphy, J. (1989). School renewal as cultural
change. *Educational Leadership, 47*(3), 70-77.


presented at the Meeting of the National Staff Development Council, St. Louis, U.S.A.

McDonald, J. P. (1986). Raising the teacher’s voice and the ironic role of theory. 


New York, U.S.A.


Meaningful and Sustainable Professional Development: Perceptions of a Teacher Study Group

I would appreciate you completing the demographic information below as it will assist in the data analysis. If, however, you are uncomfortable with this request leave it blank.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of years teaching: (Please check one)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of years in SSWN: (please check one)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 year</td>
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</table>

| Current Teaching Assignment: ___________________ | Male or Female (Circle one) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meetings attended this year: (please check one)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have attended most meetings this year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have attended about half of the meetings this year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have attended one or two meetings this year</td>
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</table>
Instructions for part one: In the section 'The priority I would assign to this aspect of professional development', please rate the degree to which each indicator is a priority to you in a professional development setting. Then under the section 'The degree it exists in SSWN', rate the same indicator to the extent you feel it is representative of SSWN.

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<tr>
<td>Sample: Provides food and beverages to participants.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>16. Is self-directed, allowing me to choose professional development that is meaningful to me.</td>
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21. Provides me with instructional strategies and lesson plans that I can use in my classroom.

22. Has direct bearing on my classroom practice.

23. Brings together educators who share a common interest or problem.

24. Focuses on deepening my subject-matter content knowledge.

25. Provides teachers the opportunity to examine and review student work.

26. Is integrated into daily life at school.

Among the aspects of professional development listed above, write your top five in order of priority.

1. _____ 2. ______ 3. ______ 4. ______ 5. ______ (Please record the corresponding number in the space provided)
Instructions for part two: Please answer the following questions. You may use the other side of the page if additional space is required.

1. In general, what do you value the most in a professional development experience?

2. What do you specifically value about participating in the Strengthening Students' Writing Network (SSWN)?

3. How have you benefited professionally and/or personally from your participation in SSWN?

4. In your opinion, what should be the role of the facilitator in a study group?

5. What advice would you give to future study groups to assist them in creating a meaningful professional development experience?
Meaningful and Sustainable Professional Development: Perceptions of a Teacher Study Group

I would appreciate you completing the demographic information below as it will assist in the data analysis. If, however, you are uncomfortable with this request, leave it blank.

Number of years teaching: (Please check one)
- 0-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21 or more

Number of years in SSWN: (please check one)
- 1 year
- 2 years
- 3 years

Current teaching assignment: 

Male Female (circle one)
In the section "The priority I would assign to this aspect of professional development," please rate the degree to which each indicator is a priority to you in a professional development setting. Then under the section "The degree it existed in SSWN," rate the same indicator to the extent you feel it was representative of SSWN.

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25. Provides teachers the opportunity to examine and review student work.
26. Is integrated into daily life at school.

Among the aspects of professional development listed above, write your top five in order of priority.

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____ (Please record the corresponding number in the space provided)
Instructions for part two: Please answer the following questions in the space provided. If additional space is required you may use the other side of this page.

1. In general, what do you value the most in a professional development experience?

2. What did you specifically value about participating in the Strengthening Students’ Writing Network (SSWN)?

3. How have you benefited from your participation in the SSWN group?

4. What advice would you give to future study groups to assist them in creating a meaningful professional development experience?

5. If you are not currently attending group meetings would you please indicate whether this is due to personal circumstances [ ] or the result of the group not meeting your needs [ ]. If the later would you please elaborate.
I would appreciate you completing the demographic information below as it will assist in the data analysis. If, however, you are uncomfortable with this request leave it blank.

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<th>Male</th>
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**Number of years teaching:** (Please check one)

0-5 | 6-10 | 11-15 | 16-20 | 21 or more |

**Current teaching assignment:**

Do you already participate in a study group or network?

YES | No | (Circle one)
Instructions for part one: In the section 'The priority I would assign to this aspect of professional development,' please rate the degree to which each indicator is a priority to you in a professional development setting.

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</table>

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1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____ (Please record the corresponding number in the space provided)
Instructions for part two: Please answer the following questions. If additional space is required you may use the other side of the page.

1. In general, what do you value the most in a professional development experience?

2. Please describe the most valuable professional development experience you have participated in.

3. How did you benefit from your participation in that experience (refer to question two)?

4. Would participating in a study group where teachers who share a common interest met regularly (ie. monthly) appeal to you? Why or why not?

5. In your opinion, what should the role be of a facilitator of a study group?
If you have any further questions or concerns with respect to this study, please contact Dr. Joe Belanger or Jonina Campbell. If you have any concerns about your treatment or your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records. Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Subject Signature Date

Printed Name of the Subject

Subject Contact Information (phone, email or both)
Appendix J

Teacher Interview Schedule

Project: Meaningful and Sustainable Professional Development: Perceptions of a Teacher Study Group

Time of interview: ________

Date: __________ Interviewer: J. Campbell

Place: ________ Interviewee: __________

Introduction: Greetings and provide a quick overview of project.

Questions:
1. In general, what do you value the most in a professional development experience? 
   *Now I want to talk about how your experiences in SSWN relate to your more general pro-d values.*
2. What did you value about participating in the SSWN group?
3. Describe how SSWN did or did not meet your more general values of professional development that you described in question number one.
4. Why did you join the SSWN study group?
5. What sustains your commitment to the group?
6. How have you benefited from your participation in SSWN?
7. In what ways has your participation in the study group influenced your philosophy about teaching writing?
8. In what ways do you think your participation in SSWN has changed your teaching practice?
9. a) Have you become involved in other professional development activities as a result of this group? If yes, please describe them.
   9b) What is it about the study group that influenced your decision to become involved in other activities?
10. a) What, in your opinion, should be the role of the facilitator in a study group?
    10b) Describe the difference, if any, between what you thought a facilitator would do in a study group and what you experienced.
11. a) How collegial did you feel toward others in the study group?
    11b) What factors played a role in this?
12. What was important to you about having the opportunity to learn collaboratively and talk with the other teachers?
13. Would you recommend attending a study group to other teachers? Why or why not?
14. What advice would you give to future study groups to assist them in creating a meaningful professional development experience?
15. Would you like to make any final comments?