

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACCESS FOR CANADIAN POST-
SECONDARY EDUCATORS AND ITS DETERMINANTS: FOCUS GROUP
CONSULTATIONS**

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Abstract

This qualitative study investigated the professional development access realities facing Canadian post-secondary instructors in a series of five focus groups over the summer and fall of 2022 employing a grounded theory approach where themes arising in the focus groups shaped the direction of the findings. The participants in this study were sixteen adult educators in both private and public educational settings in British Columbia working at six different organizations. The resulting findings are anticipated to help inform post-secondary policy makers, funders, and leaders and to affirm the experiences of those educators who are under pressure but not previously giving word to their struggle. Based on this study, and because of the increasing economic pressures facing post-secondary educators and their students today, it is recommended that further research be conducted:

- a) to better understand the impact of instructors' professional development access on student success and retention.
- b) to better develop recommendations of best practices of professional development for the sector with a lens to equity and fiscal responsibility; and
- c) to examine the role of professional development access and supports in the post-secondary career trajectories of equity deserving groups.

General Summary

Expectations of faculty members in Canada today are both educational and social in nature. While this is not new, it is coupled with an increased societal shift in concerns about equity and access. As this pertains to both labour market preparedness and post-secondary access, it is a good thing; but as it increases the expectations of post-secondary educators, it needs additional resourcing to make it sustainable. This study, building on relevant research on professional development for post-secondary educators and the corresponding outcomes, attempted to identify the gaps in professional development access to sustain the current demands on post-secondary educators.

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Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

Upon examining professional development access for Canadian post-secondary educators, what comes to the surface quickly is the pressures that today's educators face that include research activities, publication of works, and external funding expectations of their institutions (Gopaul et al., 2016; Wilton & Ross, 2017) as well as increasing class sizes and digital competency expectations that result in additional workload (Danyluk & Burns, 2021; Pomerance, 2008; VanLeeuwen et al., 2020). These stresses multiply when added to the pressures of educators with a higher proportion of student contact hours, such as community literacy workers, English as Additional Language teachers, and Adult Basic Education educators and those who find themselves working in contract or temporary positions.

Contract faculty as defined by Field and Jones (2016) are “often hired on a course-to-course basis and hold little or no job security” (p. 65). Their precarious employment situation also often includes teaching multiple sections of short-notice large undergraduate classes allowing for less time in which to complete professional development and less notice to secure timely professional development opportunities or apply for available funds to cover them.

The inclusion of these participants in this study's focus groups was intended to add to current understandings in the literature on professional development access. This research was designed to inform us further about gaps in the availability of professional development resources for post-secondary instructors and the impact that deficits in this area has on their work, their classrooms, and their students.

This investigation also served to better understand the innovative ways Canadian post-secondary educators and community partners meet or attempt to meet their professional development needs as determined by student needs and/or their career progression needs. It also examined how the current research could be used to assist, inform, and advocate for those educating in the post-secondary and workplace partner settings without professional development resources. The online focus groups which formed the basis for data collection took place across educational settings and included post-secondary educators and community partners.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Post-secondary education is a powerful tool in the fight against inequity and poverty. Many workers who find themselves trying to raise families on the earnings of one or more minimum wage jobs are doing so because other opportunities are not open to them because of a lack of a credential (Ross & Bateman, 2019). In order to have access and support to progress through the programs they need, students need the support of

informed and engaged faculty (Hu et. al., 2014). Ill-preparedness to meet students' challenges is a draining situation for post-secondary educators. Instructors are now expected to do more than teach content. They are also expected to teach life skills. This increased expectation comes with the increased demands of the labour market and increases to the cost of post-secondary education. Professional development for these educators can help them to meet the needs of both.

For example, the report *Are Canada's business schools teaching social and emotional skills?*, published by the Conference Board of Canada (2018), addresses the career essential skills needed for Canadian business school graduates, identifies gaps between curriculum and job market, and provides recommendations of a better way to address the shortfall. Their research included surveys and interviews with more than 1,000 business school students, faculty and staff, and employers during a three-year period between 2015 and 2018. They found that employers were reporting a shortage of developed emotional intelligence skills in graduates. It revealed that the business sector is calling for increased training that considers the emotional intelligence competence needed for today's public and private sector workplaces. The business schools cited difficulties assessing such knowledge and working the additional soft skills curriculum into their highly standardized program accreditations. The study concluded with recommendations to include innovative ways to assure the soft skills learning outcomes are met, many of which would require adoption by post-secondary educators to be successful.

Campbell et al. (2018) in their report on professional development issues in Canada also recognized Canadian educators' professional development needs in social contexts, student success, and educator autonomy in selecting professional development opportunities. Canadian post-secondary institutions endeavour to equip their students with skills gained through internships, job placements, practicums, co-curricular records, and community-based research. The critical thinking competencies gained improve their learning outcomes and make them better prepared employees, employers, entrepreneurs, and citizens. Considering that the bulk of that work falls on post-secondary educators and staff, institutions and policy-makers should reflect on how we can better prepare and resource them for this important task.

Campbell et al. (2017) list post-secondary educators' professional development priorities as "knowledge, skills, and practices to support diverse learners' needs; this includes attention to developing teachers' pedagogical, subject, curricular, technological, and cultural knowledge linked to students' needs and wider educational, social, and political changes" (p. 28). To understand the resourcing context of post-secondary educators in this study, it is helpful to know more about the British Columbian post-secondary funding model.

Base funding for British Columbia post-secondary institutions comes from the provincial government which in recent years has dropped to only funding 43.6% or less of total operating budgets and the shortfall is covered by international student tuition, tuition, donations, investments, ancillary services, and federal and research grants (BCFS,

2022). These shortfalls in institution operating budgets make departmental budgets even tighter, affecting both the work of teaching and learning (FPSE, 2018).

Recognition of shortfalls in professional development funding for faculty members is recognized sector-wide and BCcampus (2018) announced in their grant funding announcement that they acknowledge “that many groups do not have access to any PD funds while other groups do not have access to sufficient funds to cover all the costs”. It is within these post-secondary working conditions that I aimed to examine further the role professional access plays in educator and student success.

1.3 Research Questions

In my examination of professional development access for post-secondary educators, the questions this study aimed to answer were as follows:

1. What professional development resources are Canadian post-secondary sessional faculty typically able to access to support their work?
2. Of these resources, which are most effective in aiding with instructional strategy?
3. Of these resources, which are most effective in aiding with scholarly pursuits?
4. What relationships exist between instructor workload and the types of professional development resources they access?

5. What relationships exist between workplace morale and support and the types of professional development resources they access?

6. How has the availability of open-source professional development resources or professional development funds (of any size) affected levels of professional development engagement?

In keeping with this research focus, the focus groups were designed to:

1. Introduce findings from a review of the literature on professional development access

2. Learn about the gaps in availability of professional development

3. Learn about the innovative ways post-secondary educators meet or attempt to meet professional development needs as determined by student needs and/or career progression needs

4. Learn about how the current research could be used to assist, inform, and advocate for those educating in the post-secondary and workplace partner settings without professional development access.

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

Introduction

This literature review chapter provides an overview of the intertwining needs of both students and educators as it pertains to post-secondary access, engagement, and retention. In the process of examining the relevant research, the question of whether or not faculty have the opportunity to access professional development emerged as an unexpected factor in whether or not students experience barriers to post-secondary education (Berger et al., 2007; Danaher & Mulligan, 2020; Morris, 2019; NEADS, 2018; OECD, 2020). This effect is most clearly seen in relation to instructor capacity when they are teaching and working with marginalized learner populations.

Similar challenges that face students also face their instructors. One example is how COVID-19 affected post-secondary studies for both educators and their students. It is important to consider what is universal about post-secondary educational experiences in the context of a worldwide pandemic. Balancing the needs of the institutions themselves (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009, 2011) with the needs of their faculty (Demerouti et al., 2001; Hall et al., 2019; McInerney et al., 2012; Novaes et al., 2018; Sevunts, 2019) points to professional development access and supports as a win-win solution. Coming up with innovative and equitable solutions (ATA, 2021; Busch, 2020; Douglas, 2018) that work for all post-secondary stakeholders is key to access, engagement, and retention of both faculty and students.

2.1 Professional development as a determinant of post-secondary access

When it comes to best practices and results, providing educators with the best resources, opportunities, and experiences makes them feel confident meeting student needs. It gives them the capacity to be mindful of accessibility considerations as they pertain to non-traditional learners. In defining the non-traditional adult learner, Hyland-Russell and Groen (2011) define the traditional student as one whose experience is shaped by full time post-secondary attendance, underwritten by their family, in late adolescence or early adulthood. By contrast, non-traditional students typically face barriers and additional challenges such as delayed and part-time post-secondary enrollment, a full-time work schedule, sole financial responsibility for their education, single parenthood, dependants, lacking a high school credential, low-income resources and experiences, older student experience, recent immigration, disability, social barriers, and/or negative educational experiences as an Indigenous person in Canada.

Both Ecclestone (2007) and Shorris (2000) advise extra attention to the social and economic challenges of non-traditional students, respectively, in recognition that both societal social divisions limit possibilities and mobility while living in poverty makes survivalist thinking a default. Both experiential states need additional understanding and attention to overcome. As such, the needs of the non-traditional adult learner are in some ways greater than the needs of the traditional adult learner. In response, the professional development needs of the post-secondary educator rise to meet the classroom challenges.

Attending to the professional development needs of post-secondary educators is a way forward that is both positive and sustainable. Canadians look to post-secondary institutions to play a key role in providing a better future for their children. Bonikowska and Frenette (2021) point out that this importance placed on post-secondary education remains constant even though fluctuations in the economy. Faculty members need to be supported by sufficient professional development access in order to feel competent at meeting those expectations as it pertains to social and job market change alike.

The Council of Ministers of Canada (1999) has noted that Canadians expect post-secondary educations to make social and cultural contributions to Canada, generate and disseminate and connect with research that grows collective prosperity, wellbeing, and understanding, and serve as “pillars of regional economic growth and of global competitiveness” (p. 2). I have worked in post-secondary and community engagement for the last decade and can attest to my experience of speaking to hearing from students, parents, and community members regularly on their high expectations of Canadian post-secondary institutions. I did not find much discussion in the research literature other than university administrators MacFarlane and Brumwell (2016) reporting that less formal public discussion is taking place.

They share in their report: “Canadian colleges are sharing assessment information internally in a variety of ways, but very little information is being shared publicly” and also reported that “faculty involvement is crucial to the assessment of student learning

[and that] additional staff resources and more professional development opportunities for faculty would be most helpful” (p. 16 -17).

MacFarlane and Brumwell (2016) tell us that student learning outcomes “provide postsecondary institutions, faculty, students and employers with a common way of articulating skills and knowledge” (p. 6). Learning outcomes are developed and tied into strategic goals for many Canadian universities and are reflected in the course outcomes developed by and taught at the faculty level. This gives faculty members a key role in student development.

MacFarlane and Brumwell (2016) further note that “institutional learning outcomes (learning outcomes that are common to all students at an institution) were reported in almost half of Canadian universities” and were “most common in universities in Ontario (50%), the West-Prairie region (47%) and Quebec (42%)” (p. 19). This learning outcome driven teaching environment is the setting for the majority of the participants in this study.

One of the key findings in the Conference Board of Canada’s 2022 report was that “providing experiential learning opportunities for students through collaboration between industry and post-secondary institutions will be key to addressing labour shortages during and after Canada’s economic recovery” (p. 1). Whether it is new developments in instruction, graduate job market preparedness, or reducing the barriers their marginalized students are facing, Canadian post-secondary faculty members regularly have to report on how they are meeting their institutions’ expectations so institutions can do the same for

provincial governments and the broader public. For all students, the economic drivers necessitating university access (Conference Board of Canada, 2022) and the expectations of the universities to meet those needs (MacFarlane & Brumwell, 2016) set the stage for relevant professional development access for post-secondary educators.

Without career-long investment in ongoing professional development, educators cannot effectively participate in a post-secondary institution's initiatives to move forward in these important areas, especially when added to the traditional demands of academic workload. In a limited post-secondary funding environment where sessional or non-regular faculty levels are high across Canada, where tenured faculty members face an increase in academic service demands and sessional faculty members face higher section numbers in order to make a living wage, professional development can feel like an ill-afforded luxury. In this challenging employment environment for both permanent and non-permanent faculty, personal resources such as time and money are limited. They need their institution's professional development investment in them in order to sustain success for themselves and their students.

The literature is reflective of the insecure working conditions and increased pressure for post-secondary educators (Burazin et al., 2023, Council of Ontario Universities, 2018; Foster & Birdsell Bauer, 2018; Mohamed, 2022; Murray, 2019; Pasma, 2019; Pasma & Shaker, 2018; Rose, 2020) which includes a reduction in tenure track opportunities, a reliance on part-time and temporary teaching contracts, and a permanent faculty contingent which has not kept pace with student enrollment.

2.2 Professional development as an asset to post-secondary instruction

Professional development should not be just a luxury in the event that there is sufficient time and resources. It has a direct impact on the delivery of education. Providing educators with the best resources, opportunities, and experiences to feel confident meeting student needs and to be mindful of student access benefits students, educators themselves, and the institutions where they work. New developments in instruction and in society as a whole, of which the post-secondary institution often aspires to be a leader for innovation and change, necessitate the investment.

Faculty face continual demand for professional development in response to documented expectations captured by VanLeeuwen et al. (2020) that include digital competencies while navigating work environments with changes to job security and culture. Khan et al. (2021) and Goodwin et al. (2019) outline a hospitable working environment for faculty to refine their skills that includes positive experiences with administrative duties, mentoring and support, and professional development access as what defines their commitment to the post-secondary employer.

Canadian post-secondary institutions profess to care a lot about Canadians' wellbeing with respect to post-secondary access and inclusion. It then makes sense for the institutions to authenticate those professions with professional development funding and release that would allow faculty access to the best practices in both access and inclusion. Expecting them to do so without resources allocated sets conditions for institutional

mission, vision, and values to be unevenly applied across the institutions. Alternatively, pro-active and sustainable investment in faculty will positively impact their students and their classrooms as well as include and expect the range of student positionality, prior learning experience, and ability. Reynolds et al. (2002) found that the results of educators' job performance and resulting student success could be directly tied to professional development access.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development known by the acronym OCED (2020) lists the unemployed individuals registering with their provinces' public employment resources as eligible to pursue a wide range of opportunities that are meant to fill in the gaps and better resource citizens for securing work such as "essential skills training, adult basic education, English or French as a second language, and occupational skills training" (p. 22). These community members only benefit from inclusion in post-secondary intake if they are supported with appropriate learning environments as a result.

A first-generation student whose family has no post-secondary experience context for which to prepare and support them and a legacy student whose family knows nothing else but a lifelong preparation for post-secondary and career opportunity are not on anything like equal footing (Berger et al., 2007). To prepare faculty to anticipate and help meet the needs of first-generation students in the classroom is to strengthen the post-secondary institution itself. When facing increased demand for online learning, like educators experienced during the pandemic and which the sector will likely continue to

strive to provide, professional development in online instruction and a reduction in teaching load to accommodate it would make the most sense to ensure consistent and sustainable educational outcomes.

As Baran and Correia (2014) posit “the quality of online programs in higher education is strongly correlated with how the professional development approaches respond to the needs of online teachers” (p. 96). A clear connection can be made between the post-secondary opportunities we want Canadian students to have and what it would take to get there. To ensure we are positioning Canadian post-secondary institutions to respond to job market requirements for competent graduate preparedness, we need to arm our faculty with experiences in the field, either through networking connections and service work or scholarly and applied research (Conference Board of Canada, 2018). At the very least, it is going to require exposure to new ideas arising within the field that instructors have time to apply to course content examples and the like. A workshop on even a simple concept is time away from student engagement, lesson preparation, and marking. Faculty need to be assured it is worth their time to make the effort to prioritize professional development. If there is a risk that doing so will encourage increased scrutiny in an already stressful working environment, innovation has essentially been culturally discouraged.

The research that speaks to the little noticeable difference between tenured and non-tenured faculty instruction and concludes that it is fine to keep employing non-regular faculty as a cost saving measure (Bettinger & Long, 2010) needs to be re-

examined through a longer-term focus. Without analysis of sustainability, Canadian post-secondary institutions would be counting on a short-term savings that translates into a personal cost for faculty members and contributes to a loss in retention in the long-term. In their support of the continued reliance on adjunct faculty, Figlio et al. (2013) acknowledge it most sustainable when those faculty members are afforded more security and support.

But instead, “all too frequently, adjunct faculty are hired, given the textbook, and sent into the classroom, which positions them for unnecessary stress or potential failure in their new position” (Ervin, 2021, p. 177). This approach denies what we know about life-long learning for every workplace, the post-secondary environment included.

The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (1999) recognized that “Canadians must commit themselves to learning throughout life. This requires a healthy, responsive post-secondary education system that offers opportunity and challenge through teaching, research, and community service delivered by diverse and distinctive institutions” (p. 3). It could be argued that there is not a better place to model this prioritization than in our universities and colleges.

Danaher and Mulligan (2020) remind us that when examining inequities, “this paradox is that such education can, and often does, function as an agent of marginalisation, by contributing to, perpetuating and reproducing existing socioeconomic inequities” (p. 8). This is often the case for both precariously employed and under-resourced faculty and for ill-prepared and under-supported students.

“On the other hand,” Danaher and Mulligan encourage us, “such education can function also as a means of empowerment and of challenging and possibly transforming those inequities.” (p. 8). And this is where post-secondary mission, vision, and values have opportunity to be put into practical action. With a wider lens on the classroom experience for both educators and their students, the opportunity exists to see positive impact from attending to professional development needs in a sustainable way.

2.3 Professional development access and sustainability of engaged instruction

Professional development can also serve practically as a proactive defense against burnout. Moss (2021) brings attention to the World Health Organization’s definition that includes the setting of burnout as occurring in proximity to the workplace, making it “more than just an employee problem” and goes on to say, “it’s an organizational problem that requires an organizational solution” (p. 2).

When speaking of the time constraints on Canadian workers, the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (2016) points out that worker well-being is vulnerable, in part, because “we are spending more time commuting to jobs and employment has become more precarious” (p. 49). Where the Canadian post-secondary sector can contribute to being an example and a pillar for other sectors is in balancing both innovation and effectiveness in order to safeguard and promote employee health and well-being. Workplace support and workload balance are key to post-secondary classroom success for workers in the post-secondary sector. The literature shows that educators who feel ill-equipped for their role

or workload become measurably less competent. In contrast, Reynolds et al. (2002) found that educators who are mentored, resourced, and supported have superior outcomes.

The time that professional development takes returns to the organization more than the resources required to provide it in the first place. Fresh vision, new learned skills, and a recharged employee can translate into more engaged students and retained employees. The applications are practical, not theoretical. In order to free up employees to be able to take advantage of professional development opportunities, organizations need to properly manage workload, not by distributing vague self-care ideologies but by specific plans to reduce the 'to-dos'. As discussed in Zuber-Skerritt's (1992) work on action research, investigating professional development realities of post-secondary instructors provides a framework for such a study's undertaking.

Lee (2001) connects increased instructor support with higher levels of engagement in instruction. Lee was referring to the adoption of online instruction by educators new to the teaching modality. In today's classroom, not only has the definition of online instruction expanded to include more formats, all of which need knowledge to implement, but social expectations around access and inclusion have also created a professional development gap. Addressing this gap and reassuring faculty of their institution's support is an employee retention strategy that could be better utilized by post-secondary institutions. Routine post-secondary education exists to provide learning and opportunities that prepare graduates for work and civic life. So many of the natural by-products of post-secondary studies from time management to critical thinking and

from respectful dialogue to collaborative work will serve students even if their studies do not result in a degree.

2.4 Acknowledging the social implications and biases of research

Post-secondary education research is not without complexity. Educational research in general is less a straight-forward mechanical process than a nuanced, “deliberative, complex, subtle, challenging, thoughtful activity and [is] often a messier process than researchers would like it to be” (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 3). For the post-secondary researcher, there are many possible approaches to take and many paradigm lenses available with which to examine them. It is a safer bet to combine the ones that seem to best fit the project keeping in mind that many research approaches in education overlap and complement each other’s strengths and weaknesses.

As Cohen et al. point out “the purposes and nature of the research may be clarified by drawing on one or more of these paradigms; the paradigms can clarify and organize the thinking about the research” (p. 9). While researchers may deliberately aim for a non-biased approach, it is somewhat naïve to conclude that an exclusively objective, unbiased lens is possible.

Even when examining a set of variables with intended objectivity, “objectivity is refracted through the researcher’s eyes and the generation, construction and testing of hypotheses draw on personal understandings and formulations” (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 25). I believe the best way to address bias is to be clear in discussing both the study’s

limitations as well as the researcher's positionality. I have attempted to do so by acknowledging the place from which I discuss my review of the literature as a permanent post-secondary employee with staff and faculty experience and with leadership experience in post-secondary adjacent roles in labour and community non-profit work.

It is also important to recognize that the data set we see before us when conducting research does not only say what we think it says. In fact, "the same data can, and do, sustain multiple interpretations, claims and conclusions" (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 26). Examining the conclusions other researchers have come to before me and the conclusions educators come to when presented with the literature and discussing their experiences with one another gave me a broader picture than I could have come to on my own and helped to reduce bias.

While a clear answer is sought out in order to satisfy a research question and acknowledging that "it is the ultimate aim of scientists to formulate laws to account for the happenings in the world, thus giving them a firm basis for prediction and control" (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 11), we also have to give room for nuance, interpretation, and context. This can be accomplished by not sticking too exclusively with one research lens and research best practices recommend avoiding "simple dichotomies or absolutist ideal types: objective or subjective, induction or deduction, quantitative or qualitative" (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 14).

There is much to be learned from a variety of methodologies such as observance, survey, or interview, but it is also important to consider that they all have something to

offer and something that limits. Also important to consider is how each researcher's social values impact their research. Reading between the lines in both others' research and one's own, committing to examine one's own biases in the process, and considering a wide review of existing literature can mitigate some of the problems of imperfect humans going about the business of trying to make sense of the world through limited lenses.

Instead of feeling dismay at not being able to achieve pure objectivity, we need to acknowledge the limitations of attempting to set our humanity aside, for as we are reminded "is it really possible or desirable to set aside one's own biography, values and assumptions?" (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 26). When encountering this reminder of humanity inherent in all research, we can be confident that just as previous researchers have worked to collect a broader body of knowledge by building on one another's work, subsequent efforts to do so will continue to be helpful even if limited in each individual attempt.

When we can adopt a realistic, collaborative approach, we can recognize that our research attempts will be built on and critiqued and that is a good thing for post-secondary research as a whole. That reassured me throughout the literature review, approaching the qualitative research process, and while coming to my conclusions.

Given that access to post-secondary education has the capacity to move people out of poverty, it is socially advantageous to make post-secondary accessible to more people, make the path from low-income adult worker to university student, and help low-income families integrate post-secondary opportunities into their reality. This is

especially true in families where the post-secondary student is the first generation to gain access to the university experience. With this lens, it is key to be mindful of post-secondary students' challenges and give attention to them in our research. For example, as Munro (2011) considered in student barrier-exposing research in how employment affects academic life as when the competing demands on worker-students meet with faculty expectations. They pointed out that "Many of these students are unable to fulfil the expectations of staff who believe that students should be fully engaged scholars whose main responsibility is to study" (p. 118). The same applications can be reasonably applied to the instructor's expectations in the classroom. Knowing the experience of marginalized students experiencing poverty and systemic social challenges helps educators to reduce barriers the best they can. Post-secondary educators are working with students with a variety of experiences that impact their success (Robson et al., 2015; Rosenbaum & Naffigizzer, 2011) and their access to professional development that aids them in the more robust understandings of the barriers to some students is of great benefit both to educator and student.

Making the connection between the kind of society and economy we want and letting policy makers know, through our research, how post-secondary access and attention to student retention benefits everyone. In hand with post-secondary access, professional development access makes possible that university access. When instructors are apprised of the challenges students outside of their own demographic experience face, they are more readily able to assist them meet the challenges that post-secondary education will pose for them. Increased pressures on contribution from post-secondary

faculty to be a part of the student support and retention network at our Canadian institutions requires another layer of professional development to support this. With this support, instructors are a key part of helping students push through the challenges of the post-secondary experience to reach the labour market advantages waiting for students on the other side.

Noting that “unemployment rates for bachelor graduates [are] less sensitive to shifts in labour market conditions” (Allen et al., 2003, p. 5) to the collective in that “an increasingly skilled and educated workforce is one in which more and more of its participants have completed post-secondary studies successfully” (Berger et al., 2007, p. 11), post-secondary research makes a clear difference. When it comes to the educator’s own labour experience, institutions need to be mindful about building their capacity to meet post-secondary needs from the work culture up.

Moss (2021) advised that “To help overburdened employees, organizations should communicate more about priorities and about what can be put on the back burner until time permits (or perhaps forever)” (p. 10). Busch (2020) points out that people need to be in an anti-stressed place to be able to spot the serendipitous connections that turn into opportunities. They look like simple luck at first glance, but he notes that research has proven the stressed brain does not spot the money on the ground or the important networking connection when an unstressed brain will do so when presented with the same opportunity. It is worth reducing the stress that makes the difference between spotting and taking advantage of opportunities or not even spotting them in the first place. Given that much of modern stress occurs at work, post-secondary employers are in

a prime position to work innovatively to create a new work culture that allows for exploration and connection through personal autonomy.

Even from a fiscally conservative position, human-first professional development that reduces workload just makes sense. Kuchinke (2002) tells us that traditional human resource development is seen as a justifiable expense in that it increases the capacity and productivity of the workforce within a competitive market.

2.5 Professional development access and innovation to meet both student and instructor needs

Canadian employers and members of the general public have expectations of what post-secondary education will do for them. The Canadian Council on Learning (2009) reflected these evergreen expectations of higher education with their observance that both workplace-engaged mature learners and young students without previous workplace experience may well be learning side by side. Canadians' expectations of their post-secondary system are that both of these needs will be met and that post-secondary institutions will ensure they are. In this way, professional development access becomes a key support to faculty members, who are themselves no different than anyone else engaged in work that needs life-long learning to be successful, but also having the additional burden of providing much of that life-long learning to others. Adequate faculty professional development can ensure access, engagement, and retention for students and it can concurrently serve as an affirmation tool for employers can use to retain and engage faculty.

Student stakes are high when you take into consideration student debt loads and the trade-off between time making money to time in education. There is also the risk of graduating with a credential but without the skills employers are looking for that are not taught in high-stress time-starved learning environments.

Galvez (2020) outlines in a white paper on just COVID Canadian recovery opportunities that “investing in teacher training, in-class and online learning, and educational support networks across all levels of education increases productivity and better prepares the next generation to meet future challenges” (p. 38). This investment in education has always been important to Canadians and is becoming more so as awareness about inequities are highlighted in the general media and shared on social media.

Instructor stakes are high when you think about the expectations of post-secondary institutions, students, and receiving employers. It is a risk that the focus will be to address the needs of one of the stakeholder groups and the expense of the others or at one's own wellbeing, which results in an unsustainable working environment.

Berger et al. (2007) point out that “in the case of students who must borrow, the last bills are not paid off until long after graduation” (p. 65). This is true for many non-regular faculty members as well who in many cases are juggling commuting expenses, childcare expenses, and student loan payments, while making a fraction of what their tenured colleagues are bringing home. Add to that being employed on a touch and go basis and you begin to understand the precarious nature of their work. It is in that recognition of precarious work and the moves to stabilizing it with more support that

post-secondary institutions can minimize the negative effects of contract labour while waiting on upcoming budgets to make room for a different model. Positive change can be made in the interim.

deLaat and Schreurs (2013) share the main ways learning analytics, the identification of existing learning opportunities, aligns with two principles organizations can optimize their professional development access, namely “unplanned ongoing learning and professional development activities that are directly connected with actual work practices [as well as] a bottom-up culture of learning in organizations that is driven by the real and urgent needs of professionals” (p. 2). Many of these opportunities exist within existing budgets and simply need to have professional development parameters and flexible processes adopted and adapted to include them.

2.6 Barriers to professional development opportunities

Traditional professional development such as conferences and courses serve collegial and networking purposes in addition to their efficient delivery of new concepts and applied skills but are not readily available to all educators for a variety of reasons. While looking to a future that will include improved access to professional development, many Canadian instructors facing professional development time and resource gaps are looking at more accessible and practical ways to meet their professional development needs.

The Canadian Council on Learning (2011) suggested that “The ostensible purpose of such gatherings is to learn from the examples of [others], both their successes and their

failures” (p. 13). Loosening the parameters of the professional development process and topic and trusting faculty autonomy and identification of their own learning needs may make fiscal sense as well. When an educator can take advantage of the untraditional professional development opportunities that come their way organically, and are in a work environment in which they feel confident they will be affirmed for proactivity and not cross-examined for their professional development choices assures more faculty members can achieve similar outcomes of engagement and renewal at all levels within the academy. These choices might mean giving autonomy to faculty to pick up resources or enroll in a workshop at a limited time discount that will expire before submission and garnering of HR approvals have time to process, for example. Reducing the administrative barriers is a quick way to more uptake of professional development.

When the barrier to opportunity is time and not a direct outlay of money, having policies that support professional development by allowing time away from other work and the reduced demand of immediate reporting expectations, are effective supports for professional development access. This could happen through education policies that come from top down or in collective agreements that negotiate from the bottom up, but either way, it is essential that the conversation on PD access resumes.

The improved work culture that allows for reduced workload of the usual to-do items for the reaching of the superior ones is the one that will be rewarded for its bravery and emulated once effectiveness is observed.

While examining accessible formats for professional development, online education cannot be overlooked, but also has to be acknowledged as not the answer for everyone. While it has the potential to be lower cost and not require a commute, it may not be the answer to faculty members teaching online and working remotely and already suffering from zoom fatigue. It could be part of the solution if work structures allowed for sufficient off-line time as well and a reduction in meeting time in general. As many have observed during the COVID-19 pandemic, online learning does increase access in some contexts.

Murray (2001) reminds us that “e-learning affords small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), as well as large organizations, an opportunity to provide workplace learning” (p. 3). If other online workplace demands such as online meetings are reduced, the possibility of online professional development engagement would be more appealing.

deLaat and Schreurs (2013) note that while informal learning is an important workplace professional development tool, “there is a problem when it comes to making it a real asset within organizations: Informal learning activities are spontaneous and mostly invisible to others” (p. 1). It is important that organizations recognize the good work that is already happening. Without a new willingness to change how professional development is recognized, informal opportunities will not be counted. Coaching employees to look for where it is already happening saves on redundant professional development costs and affirms the continued engagement with topics of personal interest

and subject area application. This may present a further research opportunity for human resource departments to pursue themselves.

Echoing the concepts arising in the work of scholars such as deLaat and Schreurs (2013), Douglas (2018) outlines the idea that the pursuit of self-directed scholarly activity can serve as a professional development practice. In the case of the membership of the British Columbia Teachers of English as an Additional Language, that can be as straightforward as contributing to the non-profit's peer reviewed journal, which positions itself as newbie friendly and holds an expectation of coaching rather than excluding. That a faculty member can also record this achievement rather than simple event attendance on their CV goes beyond the typical professional development access model of funds available pending successful application to the Human Resources Department. In this way, sometimes community partners can be leaders for our post-secondary institutions. This example of peer reviewed academic journal that actively recruits and coaches first time academic journal authors as part of its non-profit mandate is doing its part to improve what innovation in post-secondary professional development access looks like.

Douglas (2018) outlines the mission with the clarifications that the journal in question “does not charge readers to access articles, nor does it charge authors to submit and publish their work. Instead, a dedicated team of volunteers ensures it remains free for everyone” (p. i). Those doing the submitting are not the only ones that are engaging in professional development access.

Douglas describes the motivation behind the service work as follows: “these volunteers are inspired by a variety of reasons, but one of the main reasons is perhaps an engagement in continuing professional development that is meaningful and relevant to a volunteer’s own scholarly practice” (p. i). This acknowledgement that professional development is already a priority for faculty members lines up with my experience of faculty members across Canada. In finding more ways to include a variety of professional development experiences for all faculty members who wish to engage in the work, we can improve educational outcomes for even more students.

Feldman and Paulson (1999) recommend faculty be empowered to use a portfolio approach to self-reflection and growth for professional development going beyond the standard current post-secondary self-reporting structures which “has traditionally been limited to vitae and reports of activities” (p. 76). This approach could be adopted at the departmental level and move from the ground up rather than waiting for a strategic planning directive. A discussion of post-secondary professional development is not complete without acknowledgement of the student loan burden many carry when graduating into low paying entry-level positions in the job market.

To minimize the amount borrowed and to support themselves while engaging in learning, “most students must juggle more than two sources of income, which means making decisions about how much work they can manage while in school, and how much money to borrow (and from where)” (Berger et al., 2007, p. 8). Educators, faced with the necessity of ongoing scholarship demands, are in a similar situation to their students.

They may be graduate students, teaching as sessional instructors while pursuing Master degrees, or they may already have their masters and doctoral degrees, but lack the permanent employment and a living wage to allow them time diverted from teaching overloads for their ongoing professional development. While many institutions may provide a professional development stipend, the adjunct professor does not have paid time to engage in that professional development. Given that they likely have the same burdensome student loans to pay off and families to raise and living and commuting expenses just to keep their work lives going, and the fact that they are paid only half of what their permanently employed colleagues are, they are going to have to work twice as many sections or hours before they even allocate hours for professional development.

What can employers do in response? They can be mindful of this inequity and provide paid professional development and research planning time, and allow the instructor to allocate that time. When the post-secondary employer remains flexible with teaching supports to accommodate instructor development and a ‘human-first’ focus on workload, ambitious projects can be realized in a sustainable way.

Baran and Correia (2014) acknowledge that depending on the institution, “an entire culture shift will be needed in some organizations in order for them to offer the appropriate support that faculty members need to successfully move into an online teaching and learning environment” (p. 97). Having the documents that outline the shifts in more human expectations within academia allows for more equitable opportunities and healthy well-balanced lifestyles that go beyond lip service to wellness principles.

Demerouti et al. (2001) correlate the demands of the job to burnout's exhaustion and the absence of job resources to burnout's disengagement. Research has shown that educator self-efficacy and employment satisfaction are correlated with a more frequent occurrence of improved job performance, peer collaboration, and engagement with in-house professional development (OECD, 2016; Opfer, 2016; Viac & Fraser, 2020).

For example, Ocampo (2021) describes a department chair colleague who developed a rubric that expanded the definition of what was reportable as one count of scholarly work. One academic journal article publication could be replaced by two publication credits in mass media or two submitted academic articles yet under review. Similarly, one external grant application was interchangeable with two internal ones or conducting three professional manuscript reviews.

Separated from the punishing juggle of unrelenting teaching load and scholarly pursuits, professional development moves in an inclusive and still scholarly direction. In addition, the positive effect of the scholarly pursuit on one's department and institution by proximity revived both personal and collegial enthusiasm for the work of teaching and learning.

Survey and focus group research can identify trends, attitudes, challenges, and behavior, but they cannot adequately capture causality. A further research opportunity arises for other researchers, many of whom are currently examining inequities within the structures of western society and our post-secondary systems (Ervin, 2020; Galvez, 2020; Hall et al., 2019; Moss, 2021; Novaes et al., 2018; Ocampo, 2021; Sevunts, 2019).

2.7 Issues of Equity in Professional Development Access

As we examine access to professional development for the post-secondary educator and its impact on the students of that educator, we do best to examine it through a lens of equity as well as educational and labour market impact.

The modern post-secondary workplace is being held to task to adapt to ever-increasing demands for change. As a sector which has historically relied on the gravitas of longevity to reinforce its hold on continual replication of existing power-structures and procedures, it may feel to some like change is being asked for too quickly. But change to reflect societal shifts makes sense for social, economic, and practical reasons.

Schockley-Zalabak (2016) tells us that “timely and creative change communication is required for a dynamic and open system” (para. 3). Nothing has exponentially demanded more workplace change from the post-secondary sector than a multi-year worldwide pandemic. Post-secondary institutions are typically large and slower to change than one might expect given their communications. The progressive ideologies commonly espoused in meetings take longer to take effect in day-to-day practice, in large part due to entrenched hierarchical structures and accompanying directional communication. Top-down communication flow is common. Additionally, the practice of traditional functional communication means top down is the post-secondary sector default even when desire is to the new and socially progressive initiative.

As Master (2018) asserts, in higher education faculties, even at the assistant dean level, academics are “bottom-up communicators who work in a top-down industry”. This

affects professional development access where the sector tendency is to expect much from faculty in application of accessible and inclusive ideology and practice, but little practical help when it comes to how that would be managed in terms of education, time to rework curriculum, or substitute instructors to allow educators to take professional development opportunities that coincide with their own teaching schedule obligations.

Given the size of post-secondary institutions, there is naturally a lag in practical application in bringing emerging voices to the table and rewarding their engagement. There also exists the reality that emerging voices are typically also overburdened voices, without practical tenure, support, or resources to fully take advantage of the new opportunities to contribute to the conversation. In my experience engaging with faculty members through their union, it is common for members without health benefits or leave access trying to care for elderly parents or children with disabilities while working with less technology than household technology needs. The gap between post-secondary employee needs and privilege is wide and it was especially felt during the pandemic. The trend runs similarly in the student population. Moreover, the established voices forge on in the emerging voices' absence or infrequency.

The editors of the Inside Higher Education Leadership report on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion noted in their 2021 trade publication: “as is often the case in organizations and [their surrounding ecosystems], efforts to drive diversity, equity and inclusion at individual colleges and in higher education will depend in part on whether and how leaders promote and support them” (p. 3). Dealing with the practicalities of

professional development access needs can be part of the support model for the good of both faculty members and the students they teach. Giving more faculty members access to professional development time means more colleagues feel recharged and informed and better equipped to head into the classroom even in challenging teaching environments.

2.8 Faculty member academic autonomy

Even within a large institution, guided by overarching policies of which there can be little deviation, there is room for a variety of working interpretation and practical processes adopted by individual departments. The policies can be slow to reflect reality, but in the meantime departments can try new variants on old procedures and use the good results to lobby for institutional policy change to bring the university out of the old ways and into the new.

Carlson et al. (2016) ask us to consider proactive workplace adoption of social media to reflect workplace realities. This also makes space for the reality that timely and affordably accessible professional development may be there. Okoro and Washington (2012) make the case for real and intentional diversity and inclusion in our post-secondary institutions to begin to address the inequities we witness nationally and globally. Some of those new ways might include recognition for informal professional development, for example attending a Facebook live event on a specialized topic.

Schockley-Zalabak (2015) speaks to the trend Carlson et al. (2016) are identifying and asserts that “technology has changed and is changing literally all types of

relationships in which we engage. We no longer work only with those whom we have face-to-face contact” (section 5.8, para. 1).

Whether it is multi-campus staff contingents of the same department or faculty members spread across face-to-face, hybrid, and online options; colleagues are likely to have to “work effectively with others using a variety of communications technologies” (Schockley-Zalabak, 2015, section 5.8, paragraph 1). Of the communication technologies referenced, social media plays an important and growing role. Carlson et al. (2016) acknowledge that social media is a reality in the modern workplace and ask us to consider the ways its positive uses can be leveraged, while negative impacts of it be reduced.

Common sense management best practices would be to assume social media workplace best practices and communicate that positive assumption frequently. This serves to encourage those who are not yet attaining social media in the workplace best practices to either feel inspired to continue to strive to hit the expected and stated best practices target or feel convicted of their deviance from the stated expectations. Both reactions serve to bring the workplace in line with the organization’s need for responsible social media use in the workplace.

The most accessible professional development is often available via social media platforms which are full of no cost, peer created resources, so having a workplace that recognizes this and is social media inclusive when recognizing professional development tracking makes meeting PD needs with a limited amount of time and money possible. Manca and Ranieri (2014) also underline the principle of economic equity underlying

such professional development access. Carlson et al. (2016) advocate for post-secondary institutions to embrace of the use of social media in the workplace with the expectation that employees will gain increased communication capacity because of it. As with the post-secondary sector's adoption of emails, websites, and internet research in days long past, they "argue that using social media more intensely will likely lead to an enlarged repertoire of uses for social media, just as occurs with other communication media" (Carlson et al., p. 20).

On the task-oriented behaviour side, employee skill-building benefits include "creative thinking, the generation of new ideas, and managing one's reputation or impression", all of which benefit their employer (Carlson et al., 2016, p. 18). Additional helpful social media workplace applications cited include brainstorming, polling, networking, advertising, information gathering, and advising. Carlson et al. (2016) reflect the realistic assumption that social media is here to stay and needs to be accounted for rather than discounted. They suggest "that as intensity of social media increases, users will expand their knowledge of the medium and progressively use it for engaging in social media task-oriented behaviors" (p. 19).

It is not only social media that challenges the procedures and biases of post-secondary institutions. The call for diversity in the post-secondary workplace is a current and pressing issue as well. When we think of the growing free professional development and information sharing opportunities on TikTok for example, it would be short-sighted to discourage employees from consuming social media content at work. As more Canadian post-secondary staff and faculty members are tasked with creating and

managing social media accounts on behalf of committees, task forces, departments, and faculties, their online responsibilities also tends to create an increased awareness of branding responsibilities on behalf of the institution. This content creator position already places post-secondary employees on social media for the institutions' benefit.

Formalizing and accepting more informal formats of professional development such as those videos watched on YouTube and TikTok means social media can in turn benefit these educators, recognizing that being up in one's field often doesn't wait for a traditional print publication timeline.

Effective professional development also addresses an important post-secondary access issue. Even if institutions are able to recruit and admit non-traditional students, if they are not able to support those students to a successful outcome, the uplifting of marginalized communities, richness of university community, and graduating assets to the job market hoped for will not come to fruition. Essentially, it would be the same outcome as if those students had not been recruited at all.

2.9 Creating conditions for student success through professional development

The literature review highlighted the challenges faced by professors in this situation. They included a lack of information on strategies to put student development theory to work and not being trained in the practices of supportive language and engaging teaching methods at the post-secondary level to capture the attention and focus of students enabling them to learn. Using the andragogical theory set out by Knowles et al. (2014) as a counterpoint to traditional pedagogy (which focuses on teaching children),

the author accepted the challenge to move students through the four adult learning stages: realizing independence, accumulating learning experiences, relating classroom learning to life and career, and relating classroom knowledge to immediate application.

When instructors are not properly resourced and developed they inadvertently do a disservice to their students, some of whom may not have the social and financial resources to sign up again if faced with a discouraging semester of post-secondary experience which leads them to drop out. The major findings of this study were that students who arrive at post-secondary inadequately prepared can be caught up by engaged faculty members who employ multiple learning style modalities, model mentorship, establish a peer mentor system, and help students to think critically about their successes and identity and how the two are related. Students also increased their access to the professor's office hours by 10%. It also improved their vision for their life outside of school and empowered them to take the actions to reach for that life they could now envision. Most encouraging, these changes were noted in students who often found themselves at great disadvantage, stuck in a limiting narrative and offered fewer choices.

Many "changes related to esteem were noted in students of color, first-generation students, and those who have been out of school for seven plus years. Students' language and mindset changed from hopeless and discouraged to hopeful and empowered" (Griffin, 2019, p. 340). Beyond coursework, 65% of students subsequently engaged in follow-up discussions on other classes, longer programs, mentors, and volunteer roles that might offer them opportunities. These discussions were rich in problem solving.

Griffin (2019) noted that “students elaborated on potential challenges that they might have experienced as a non-traditional student of color and/or first-generation students” (p. 340). By discussing these obstacles, students worked out ways around them and identified mentors who could help advise them further. This empowerment also translated into a greater sense of what they were able to accomplish.

Griffin (2019) further reported that “students become motivated to hold themselves accountable academically in college. With the teaching and mentoring strategies they received, the journey to becoming self-actualized was evidenced” (p. 341). Results were especially noticeable in oral communication frequency, confidence, and competency rates among the students. Overall contributions increased 50% over the entire participant set and increased a staggering 70% among students who the data sets previously identified as reserved. Another success indicator is the transition of students from mentee to mentor.

Over a four year period, 10% of the students (among them now educators, business owners, graduate students, and health professionals) participate in the networking event set up by the university called the “Annual Fellowship Dinner”. This event is intended to help students build their network and “offer successful strategies and words of encouragement to current undergraduate students [as well as] exchange concerns and adaptive resolutions to being persons of diverse backgrounds and the challenges experienced in academia and career opportunities” (Griffin, 2019, p. 342). This occurs naturally when engaging in professional development. Discussion within this study highlights under limitations that even if a faculty member is familiarized with the

learning strategies and is motivated to use them, they will still need to practice self-reflection and “be cognizant of who they are as a facilitator of adult learning” (Griffin, 2019, p. 342). The pressures that post-secondary educators face are discussed with frequency (Danyluk & Burns, 2021; Gopaul et al., 2016; Pomerance, 2008; VanLeeuwen et al., 2020; Wilton & Ross, 2017) while their supports lag.

Griffin (2019) also explains development in this teaching area may be higher for some faculty members than others in that “personality can impact student interaction and thus, professors are encouraged to be mindful of personality characteristics that present them as being unapproachable” (p. 343). When the educator has their own practice and reflection comfortably in hand, they are easier able to model confidence and reflective thinking to their students for whom both thinking positively and critically about their abilities may well be new experiences. But this framework is essential. As the cliché goes, whether students think they can or they cannot, they are right. The post-secondary literature is full of the documented link between academic confidence and success as well as the inverse.

Making the connection between students’ belief in themselves and their success, Linn (1999) points out as an emerging theme something that shows up in both classroom and workplace settings which, when it is not working, is described as “deprecating comments framing metacognitive reflections (thinking about thinking)” (p. 26). This development of students is not only the responsibility of the faculty of course.

Within discussion of the function of post-secondary education in Canada, the Council of Ministers of Education (1999) assert that post-secondary institutions are “to

inspire and enable individuals to develop their capabilities to the highest potential levels throughout their life (for individual growth, self-sufficiency, and fulfillment and for effective contributions to society and the economy)” (p. 4). It is because of this imperative that they also owe their faculty support in the teaching of both subject matter and the learning itself. To expect faculty members to engage in the work without being properly resourced for the time away from the classroom and existing academic demands is to be unrealistic about the pressures on post-secondary educators. It also means risking losing them to institutions that are doing a better job of resourcing them or to other sectors that are demonstrating awareness of the workplace support needs and a willingness to address them.

Dare and Leach (1999) discuss within desired student outcomes that the classic soft skill competencies relating to the job market remain key when examining outcomes from a study a decade earlier, and The Conference Board of Canada (2021) would argue those same social and emotional skills remain relevant today. Even so, they note in their issue briefing released this year that student career success preparation depends on social and emotional skills development at the post-secondary level through applied training and assessment, but that analysis of current Canadian post-secondary strategic plans reveals that just over 50% mention desired outcomes that prioritize student success via social and emotional skills. This is not enough to ensure success for all Canadian post-secondary graduates. The more that we are learning about how we learn and coupled with calls for equity across society, it has never been more apparent that how we teach at the

post-secondary level plays an important role both in access in a practical sense and empowerment and social change at an exemplary one.

As Hagedorn et al. (2002) note, “unsuccessful college students do not necessarily lack intelligence or a desire to succeed. Rather, they are constrained by learned or acquired behavior patterns that inhibit advanced learning” (p. 133). This case study serves to make the post-secondary solutions to this inequity clear. While post-secondary education participation has never been higher in Canada, especially among the youth population, there is a troubling 10% of youth who have not completed a high school diploma (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009). Adult Basic Education programs at post-secondary institutions are an important resource for students who dropout of high school for one reason or another and then find the opportunity or necessity of completing it to get into post-secondary or job opportunities that would pass them by without it.

Aside from gaps in high school completion, another inequity is the lack of awareness about post-secondary costs and funding opportunities within many families without a history of post-secondary attendance. Shortfalls in information were in areas of availability of scholarships, likelihood of receiving scholarships on academic performance alone, and the rates of success in securing them (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009).

In more encouraging trends, “many young Canadians are participating in and completing post-secondary programs along different pathways than students from previous years” (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009, p. 13). This approach is more realistic job market and personal interest engagement focused. “Some students still

follow the traditional linear path in PSE, while many follow less direct routes, which can include attending more than one postsecondary institution or switching programs of study” (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009, p. 13). Recommendations from a 2008 study include increased importance placed on prior learning assessment recognition and accommodations in credit transfer to meet the needs of this PSE student trend (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009, p. 13). This trend is in line with life-long learning and the recognition that careers in today’s job market are unlikely to follow a singular linear path. Instructors can be assets to their students if properly prepared on the issues facing them.

A decade later, the Statistics Canada (2019) Infographic *Staying the Course: Persistence and Graduation of Post-Secondary Students in Canada* further reflects the program shifts from degree to certificate for a sub-group of graduates as well as variances in completion rates. The Statistics Canada (2019) publication *Student pathways through post-secondary education in Canada, 2010 to 2015* tells us that student employment is often a key factor in delaying graduation by a few years. Life-long learning and career change has been part of many Canadians’ stories. It is difficult to anticipate what opportunities may present themselves as the job market changes. Life-long learning keeps career interests engaging and relevant.

In terms of mentors, life-long learners in a variety of careers have much to share with the first-generation students. Recognizing challenges and barriers to post-secondary education and showing students how to navigate around them and access the services they need is key to getting this contingent of students enrolled, supported, and set up to be tomorrow’s mentors. Canadian job market realities make it essential for post-

secondary institutions to meet the needs of mature learners. As our educators engage in and discuss their own learning experiences, students are encouraged to see the relevance of learning for its own sake, past the short term goal of graduation.

Many scholars point to persistence, resourcing and inclusion as key parts of the adult learner need profile. Echoed throughout the literature, these components of the mature learner post-secondary experience determine success. They are integral to meeting the needs of the adult learner. In order to meet adult learners' needs, it is first important to see how their student profile differs from their younger counterparts. Panacci (2015) reminds us that adult learners need to see a concrete transferability between their education and their employability in order to engage as they tend to evaluate their educational experiences for how supportive they are to their individual career and life plans. It stands to reason that the adult learner's desire for practical application of learning would also apply to student services workshops and resources.

Van Rhijn et al (2016) share that in their study “participants saw the attainment of a degree as *the* path to a fulfilling career” (p. 19). The career end goal often starts as the main impetus for post-secondary study for the mature learner. In modelling the continued learning throughout the teaching and learning journey, we are more likely to meet post-secondary institutional ideals to be graduating life-long learners and critical thinkers.

Schuetze and Slowey (2002) underline the importance of meeting adult learning needs in that these mature learners are, “for a complex range of social, economic and cultural reasons, were traditionally excluded from or under-represented in higher

education” (p. 324). Recognizing that they are taking a calculated risk in taking on debt to secure their education or taking time away from the job market to participate, we see that the stakes are higher for them than they are for their younger peers, having also to contend with additional stressors such as the needs of their dependents as they navigate their post-secondary studies and potential ageism in the workplace upon graduation. Gender also factors into mature learner barriers. Jamalof et al. (2022) tell us that “women are disproportionately affected by insufficient caregiver support as they are more likely to be mature students with dependents” (p. 6). To address workplace access challenges for mature students, the same study recommends government funding for on-campus career student service expansion.

They propose the creation of targeted programs to assist adult learners “such as work-integrated learning [on campus as well as funding for] co-op and internship employers, designated for the hiring and compensation of mature students, and providing employment opportunities, such as work-integrated learning, to mature students” (Jamalof et al., 2022, p. 8). Even before government funding addresses such a measure, post-secondary university student services could be mindful of such a gap and move to mitigate it through student information resources and pave the way for future programming. Informing instructors of the resources available for students through professional development workshops makes them able to refer students to appropriate student services. Swain and Hammond (2011) speak to the engagement of the adult learner and the positive life applications of student engagement in that “many of [their study’s] participants spoke about their sense of achievement [and realizing] that they

were as good as the next person, and this fostered an increase in self-esteem and belief” (p. 603). Student services which help students find their place, build community, and provide supports for success fast-track this kind of adult learner development in personal capital. Trueman and Hartley (1996) discuss the increased need of student service supports for adult learners, noting “a commonly-held view is that part-time and mature students have more problems to cope with than do traditional students and that, as a consequence, they have greater problems with time-management skills” (p.201).

Additionally, VanRhijn et al (2016) identify “social supports from the institution, employers, families, and friends [as crucial to] facilitating success” (p. 33). Bringing together the practical development of needed skills with the community engagement of student belonging in student services programming meets several needs of the adult learner at once. Even early on in the academic journey, Myers and de Broucker (2006) suggest that adult learners would benefit from resources that shed light on their learning options, specifically “easy-to-digest information about the range of available learning options; step-by-step guides on how to access the learning opportunity that is best for them; and enough information about the costs and benefits of skills upgrading to make an informed decision” about their education (p. viii). While not one factor is responsible for mature learner success, MacFadgen (2007) posits that “it may be that mature students’ persistence will be the best understood in relation to some combination of external circumstances, academic performance and expectations, and student integration experiences” (p. 29). Coming at the challenges from multiple approaches ensures the likelihood that student needs will be met.

MacFadgen (2007) connects “the dynamic interplay of individual, institutional, and external factors [with a recognition of] their joint influence on mature students’ quality of life and retention” (p. 46). What is good for the student is good for the institution. Examining the needs from an adult learner focused lens ensures that traditional student services approaches are not being applied to adult learners and missing the mark.

Fritz (2016) points out that “it is therefore very important for institutions to acknowledge the non-linear paths taken by these students, in order to best support them through study” (p. 59). In later examination of student service focus in Canada through recruitment and retention reports as well as student services worthy of inclusion in a best-practices toolkit, this support approach becomes apparent. Fritz (2016) also noted the changing realities of the Canadian post-secondary student experience in that “it is perhaps time for institutions, policy makers, and researchers alike to reconsider their perceptions of what a ‘traditional’ student is in order to allow for a new era of education to begin especially given changing demographics, the shift towards knowledge-based economies, and increasing need for lifelong learning” (p. 59). It is also looking at the post-secondary instructor through the learner lens that prioritizes professional development.

Chapter 3 Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

The methodology for this study, which was conducted within an online setting, followed the advice of Cohen et al., (2018) when it comes to research in virtual settings, expanding upon the traditional research context as it offers “rich communication affordances and some unique opportunities for data capture, including the ability to record sound, chat and text as well as contemporaneous images and video in real time” (p. 467) and also raises a need for further examination of ethics when it comes to the recording of participant contributions. The study introduction letter (Appendix A) and informed consent letter (Appendix B) both contained advising and assurances for participants to optimize anonymity and minimize the risk of an adverse outcome for anyone. It also reminded participants of their agency in the process. The short demographic survey questions (Appendix C) also aimed to reflect the best practices of equity principles.

3.1 Participants

Among the participants, primarily made up of educators identifying as women, the majority were in the 46–55 age range, with the rest divided between the 31-45-year-old and 56-70-year-old age ranges. All stages of career progression were represented among the participants. The majority reported some access to professional development,

but the survey did not specify fiscal allocations or replacement costs. The specifics of the participant demographics can be seen in the chart Figure 2.1.

As shown in Appendix 3, Demographic Survey and Precoded Responses, I included categories of gender (woman, man, non-binary, prefer not to disclose, prefer to self-describe); age groupings (21-25 years old, 26-30 years old, 31-35 years old, 36-40 years old, 41-45 years old, 46-50 years old, 51-55 years old, 56-60 years old, over 60 years old); employment (early career – non-permanent faculty, early career – permanent faculty, mid career – non permanent faculty, mid career – permanent faculty, late career – non-permanent faculty, late career – permanent faculty, part-time employment - community education, full-time employment – community education, part-time employment – workplace education, full-time employment – workplace education, prefer to self-describe), PD access (in-house PD, partial PD pro-rated for part-time employment, full PD associated with full-time employment, partial PD with access to supplementary funds, full PD associated with full-time employment, self-directed, self-funded PD) in order to gain a fuller picture of the contexts the participants were speaking to their experiences from. In providing so many categories to choose from, I hoped to provide participants with the encouragement that they were expected in this research, that their experiences mattered, and that their observations would be worthwhile and meaningful to the post-secondary sector at large and Canadian post-secondary educators in particular, who would see their experiences also reflected in the literature as a result.

Figure 1.1 Participant Demographics

Participant	Employment	PD Access	Age	Gender
1	Mid-career, non-permanent faculty	In-house PD	31-35 years old	woman
2	Full-time non-teaching faculty	Self-directed, self-funded PD	51-55 years old	woman
3	Early career, permanent faculty	Full PD associated with full-time employment	36-40 years old	man
4	Permanent, part-time, late career	Partial PD associated with part-time employment	Over 60 years old	woman
5	Mid-career, permanent faculty	Full PD associated with full-time employment	46 – 50 years old	woman
6	Late-career, non-permanent faculty	Self-directed, self-funded PD	36-40 years old	woman
7	Full-time employment, community education	Full PD associated with full-time employment	46-50 years old	woman
8	Mid-career, permanent faculty	Full PD associated with full-time employment	46-50 years old	woman
9	Late-career, non-permanent faculty	Full PD associated with full-time employment	46-50 years old	woman
10	Late career- permanent faculty & part-time employment – community education	Full PD associated with full-time employment	56-60 years old	woman
11	Late-career, non-permanent faculty	Partial PD pro-rated for part-time employment	51-55 years old	woman
12	Early career, non-permanent faculty	Partial PD associated with part-time employment	36-40 years old	woman
13	Mid-career, full time, workplace education	Full PD associated with full-time employment	41 – 45 years old	woman
14	Mid-career, part-time, workplace education	Self-directed, self-funded PD	46- 50 years old	woman
15	Mid-career, permanent faculty	Full PD associated with full-time employment	51-55 years old	woman
16	Mid-career, non-teaching faculty	Full PD associated with full-time employment	46-50 years old	woman

Figure 1.1 Participant Demographics

This study employed snowball sampling. From one presented opportunity, other participants were recruited for the next opportunity based on both their availability and connectedness to the network of participants already engaged with the study. The participants were also connected to my network of colleagues in both my day job in post-secondary as well as my non-profit work in community engagement and education access.

Participants were introduced and invited to the study through my existing professional networked groups. These included a BC post-secondary faculty and staff association and post-secondary educators across Canada met through labour movement workshops, and a provincial Adult Basic Education association, and with connection to groups at a higher likelihood of barrier to professional development access. The ABE association educators serve in the fields of Adult Basic Education, English as an Additional Language, and Continuing Education, community literacy and whose students' are frequently facing the barriers that come with access education including learning disabilities, poverty, and language barriers.

By participating in a focus group, instructors had the opportunity to contribute in an effort to make changes to post-secondary professional development access as well as learn of innovative ways they might personally be able to access additional funds and PD opportunities.

3.2 Data Collection

The participant focus groups offered monthly from July 2022 to October 2022, included sessional and permanent faculty teaching in a variety of disciplines, as well as community literacy and workplace trainers, English as an additional language (EAL) teachers, and Adult Education and Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Continuing Education educators. The composition of the focus groups was small (4-5 participants) to allow for single researcher administration. The online platform allowed a group of up to 16 to appear on the screen at once which, given my experience chairing meetings, is

enough to note anyone who has a hand raised at once, but does not allow for a free flow of ideas. Thus, the smaller group of 5 to 10 allows for more frequent contribution from each participant and a safer space in which to piggyback on ideas shared and make immediate connections to larger themes and previously presented research. This proved to be the case in the focus groups, which ended up being smaller groupings according to educator availability. According to applied research guidelines drawn out by Krueger and Casey (2009), even though ideal marketing research focus group size is 10-12 people, non-commercial topics are best covered by five to eight participants as groups of more than 10 provide participants insufficient opportunity to share their insights and experiences.

The zoom meeting privacy settings made sure that the consultation was private by using a password and by only allowing actual participants into the meeting. Prior to beginning the focus group session, participants were asked to complete a short demographic survey, outlined in Appendix C. Participants were assured that names would not be associated with this short survey and that any combination of information that could be used to identify a single participant would not be presented together in reports or presentations to protect their confidentiality.

Canadian and international research regarding professional development access and its determinants were presented at the beginning of the focus group. A presentation on the research was included as an introduction to the discussion to have a jumping off point of context for all participants and to investigate whether their experiences matched

what was already in the literature or if it added conflicting or nuanced details. I had seen this modelled in another research project in the previous year and felt as a participant that it made me understand what the researcher's assumptions were, allowed me to feel comfortable voicing my observations that deviated from as well as those that supported their findings to date, and felt it provided a robust confident discussion among the other participants who felt informed and clear on the expectations as well. I do not feel that the presentation of research may have biased or altered perspectives of focus group participants any more than speaking as a group would have.

In any group discussion there is risk of group think, but I did not see it reflected here. While participants were respectful and collegial, they did not hesitate to point out where their experiences and opinions differed from their fellow participants. The only way to ensure no outside influence of perspectives would be to hold only one-on-one interviews. The risk of this approach would be a smaller chance that participants would ask for clarity around a question or discussion point as they would only be hearing their own thoughts in a vacuum. While the group approach does hold the possibility of one focus group member influencing another, I think it is helpful for a group discussion with a wider understanding of post-secondary context that comes from collaboration and idea exchange. The groups were diverse in experience and opinion and brought a robust response that arose in clear themes in response. The short presentation given to them at the beginning of the session is included in this study as Appendix 5.

After the short overview, the participants were asked to discuss their perceptions about the current research, explore whether it aligned with their experience with professional development access or not, what they perceived to be the gaps in professional development research, and how the current research and study's findings could be made actionable within Canadian post-secondary education. Each video and audio recorded session took 1-2 hours depending on the level of engagement and time availability of the focus group. Participants were assured of their anonymity within reporting but were also reminded that while the researcher could control their confidentiality in reporting, it was their responsibility as to what they choose to share in their session with other participants, as outlined in the informed consent letter (Appendix B). If participants wanted to share sensitive information that they felt unsafe sharing in the focus group, this researcher welcomed them to submit it following the focus group via email. These recommendations and protocols were also repeated at the beginning of the session along with a reminder of best practices for focus group behaviour. Participants were thanked, and the connection made between their participation to overarching outcomes: both personal benefit in accessing potentially new information as well as service contributing to increased professional development access for post-secondary educators and community partners across Canada.

The purpose of the focus groups was to inform the participants, themselves immersed in the experience of professional development access, with the literature review conducted on professional development access and its determinants. In exposing the participants to this knowledge and gleaning feedback on how it intersects or diverges

from their experiences, this project intended to build upon the current Canadian and international research on professional development access to provide recommendations helpful to post-secondary policy makers, unions, management, and individuals.

3.3 Grounded Theory Methods

I selected grounded theory as a methodological choice so that the current issues in the post-secondary workplace, as shared by post-secondary educators, would add to the current literature on the professional development challenges for the post-secondary environment would be expanded upon.

Through sharing the initial start of the literature review with the participants, I was able to see where there were realities that resonated with trends I had previously seen in the post-secondary workplace that were not yet captured in my literature review. I was able to follow up with participants and look for additional evidence that more post-secondary educators were experiencing these challenges by searching the access situations that were presented.

Grounded theory allows the emerging themes to rise to the top and make themselves priorities, leading both the research process and the analysis as pictured in Figure 1.1. The analytical approach employed in the Grounded Theory process was constant comparison analysis, which is when all of the data collected in the focus group was compared throughout to the other data collected in order to form the themes and categories, concepts and results.

I ensured rigor, validity, and reliability in the data collection approach and analysis by holding the same length of focus group throughout as well as turning on closed captioning transcribing for the zoom sessions to ensure each sessions' responses were captured in the same software. At the end of the data collection, I downloaded the resulting transcripts which gave me a reliable data set to sort into themes. I was the only researcher working with the data, also ensuring a reliable and consistent analysis throughout.

Figure 2.1 Steps of Grounded Theory Approach as It Informed the Design of the Study



Figure 2.1 The steps of the grounded theory approach as it informed the design of the research study

In my research, I aimed to let the themes arising from the series of focus groups with Canadian faculty members shape the resulting thesis. The recordings were transcribed and used to develop recommendations from across all the focus groups. In the data processing stage, I printed the focus group transcripts and read through them multiple times to get the overall context of all of the focus group data together. Then I moved on highlighting and identifying themes and then putting together a document of the combined focus group transcripts and copying, pasting, and moving quotes from one section to another to allow themes to emerge. The recommendations were then developed into a draft report which served as the initial basis of my thesis.

Some of the resulting themes echoed what was already in the literature and some added new nuance to the ongoing discussion of what makes for instructor and student success. The grounded theory research methodology described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was introduced as a more organic way of sorting data and letting the results drive the discovery and not letting the hypothesis drive the evidence seeking. All this time later, grounded theory is a well-established methodology, well-suited to a practice-oriented environment.

My interest in applying the theory as it was further developed by Barney Glaser, one of the two pioneers of this research method, whose approach described by Martin and Gynnild (2012) focused more on the organic leading of the participants over the researcher's agenda. I combed through the transcripts and made thematic heading as I approached a change in topic and then when I came across the same topic discussed in a

later group, moved that note as well to the category in question. Many of the topics raised prompted subsequent literature review to make connections from my small sample size to a larger post-secondary educational experience. I found them to be congruent.

As Jarvis (2018) posited in this approach to qualitative research, it was “important [that] the framework did not force categories” and instead that the categories naturally arose from what was discussed (p.10). The literature review continued throughout the lead up to the focus groups and continued after as I analyzed the data through this qualitative research lens and attempted to make connections between what these faculty member participants were reporting with what was already published in the field.

Chapter 4 Analysis and Discussion of the Data

Introduction

Professional development experiences vary from instructor to instructor, but several themes arose in the focus groups held over the summer and fall of 2022. They are the connection between effective professional development and its improvement of instructor and student resilience, the structural barriers to undertaking professional development regularly, and the recommendations to improve professional development access.

Indeed, within the focus groups, the first one held in July 2022 still reflected pandemic stressors and effects of workplace capacity and access to professional development. In the focus groups the months following, less emphasis was placed on the stressors of the pandemic and more discussion centered on the lessons learned during the pandemic such as centering students' online experiences and learning as an instructor in the formats you are presenting to your students in order to identify where their struggles might lie.

Themes of zoom fatigue, burnout, juggling multiple roles within confined spaces emerge as well as what variances and additional barriers exist among post-secondary experiences in a worldwide pandemic. Themes such as internet speed and tech access from community to community and from country to country and from income group to income group, as well as additional stressors such as income instability, not having access to health benefits amid a health crisis, etc.).

4.1 Resources Most Effective in Aiding with Instructional Strategy

For some who had the time and means to do professional development in the pandemic, it was an opportunity. It was recognized that professional development increases employee retention but there was another aspect which was particularly resonant in the first focus group in July of 2022 when the pandemic was still more of an impact than it was later in the year. Most teaching was still done online with all the extra work that creates and instructors noted that while they were grateful for professional development opportunities, there was a feeling of overwhelm expressed. Especially given that these opportunities were primarily also online, there was fatigue with the format and the flood of informal opportunities arising.

For others, who are mid-career and are already a specialist in an area there may not be readily available training at the time they need it. One focus group member was a specialist in reading recovery, a language teaching method that was initially established to teach struggling young readers by employing specific notation and consistent approach which she has successfully applied to English as an Additional Language instruction. The professional development in the field is primarily in another country and focuses on young children, both of which pose a challenge to professional development application. Another group member pointed out to this participant that the approach she might need to use to further her professional development in this area is to engage in individual research around the subject.

Professional development was primarily seen by the participants as assisting with making a focused learning plan for oneself, to decide what best aligns with career trajectory whether that is leadership approaches or subject matter expertise. Others noted that the most effective professional development was to continue pursuit of their graduate level credentials as the flexibility of the programming also allowed for exploring subject matter that directly impacted their knowledge in the classroom.

4.2 Typical Post-Secondary Faculty PD Access Experience

It was recognized by participants that often there is a time shortage for professional development. Even when funding is available for professional development, sometimes instructors cannot get time off to undertake it. This is especially true for training day-based programming such as trades and nursing and for educators teaching in the developmental levels which often have double the student contact hours that university transfer subjects require. Sometimes it is not time, but lack of capacity such as was reflected in the progression of processing of effects of pandemic on burnout. The first focus group in the early summer of 2022 referred to overwhelm, social effects, and lack of capacity more often than the subsequent groups.

Also noted was the failure of institutions to practically consider online professional development as they would in-person professional development when it came to compensation. One focus group member noted that when professional development opportunities exist online, instructors are often expected to complete the

coursework on their own time without further compensation even though the expectation of pursuing professional development exists as part of their role.

Especially for precariously employed faculty, not being guaranteed work from contract to contract and working for partial wages compared to their permanently employed peers, finances were often reported to play a role in professional development barriers. One participant, herself simultaneously a sessional faculty member and a non-profit community leader, recognized that smaller community-based non-profits may feel the financial squeeze thus prioritize a few team members to get the training and then ask them to share the knowledge with the rest of the team; a strategy which she admitted is not always successful.

When it came to talking about ineffective professional development strategies, frustration ran high. When their institutional processes do not seem to recognize workload or the reality of the post-secondary classroom demands and pacing, this was perceived by instructors as disrespectful. When the academic unit manager dictates what the educator's professional development days are going to consist of, it was reported to do more than affect educator morale. This micromanagement comes at an additional cost. Participants discussed the missed opportunities for self-determined needed professional development that are often not realized in this type of workplace environment.

Focus group academics acknowledged both that entry level workshops are “not the best use of [time]” and that workshops are often provided on what seems to be

trending rather than careful consideration of what competencies need to be further developed.

As one group member phrased the gaps of availability, “it seems like there’s huge amounts of funding for what I call flashy topics like homelessness or you know drug overdose prevention, things like that, but when you get to literacy, it’s not the flashy fun topic that everybody wants to hear about or acknowledge that it is an issue”.

Additionally, when the educator has surpassed the level being offered, it can put them at risk of not looking cooperative in the workplace.

One participant confessed: “I’ve stopped going. I’ve stopped attending because I find it to be a waste of time because [I’m] already more educated than many of my peers and sometimes it’s good reminders but I don’t want to spend three hours sitting through a workshop that I could teach.” It was recognized by participants that barriers to professional development often have negative implications on important initiatives such as Indigenization. If the institution is not providing opportunity, including teaching release or flexible scheduling to engage in opportunities for education around decolonization and reconciliation, it casts doubt on the institutional commitment to the process for faculty members.

Especially noticeable in the first focus group in the thick of the pandemic, but still relevant in continuing discussions, educators noted that sometimes “the complexities of our social world nowadays are impacting professional development”. They spoke of both the fracturing of society into political wings – a process that was emotionally exhausting

to navigate and prevented engagement with professional development in such an environment as well as the increased social awareness and calls for education on topics of equity, which creates a post-secondary expectation for instructors to be well-informed and able to contribute to their students' awareness. This pressure does not necessarily translate into the instructors having resources at work to do so. Time is most noticeably in shortage.

4.3 Resources Most Effective in Aiding with Scholarly Pursuits

Both the literature and the focus groups agreed that the most effective professional development formats are the ones that allow educators to follow their interests and identify gaps, and complement their classroom demands. Practically, the most frequently cited in top of this category is the flexibility of asynchronous professional development online.

As one focus group member said, "If I had to go and take a class face to face, or go to a [synchronous] webinar workshop face to face, I might be less reluctant to do it, considering you know, our busy lives., [convenience is worth a lot]."

Another participant shared, "I wouldn't be doing my doctorate if I wasn't able to do it online. I just wouldn't. I don't have time. I'm a single parent. I work jobs like I still have time, but because it's online and it's asynchronous, I can work it in life, but there are other [coaching/support groups] that I attend weekly as well online" p. 46 [which add up to] "a couple of years of mentors and meetings". All of this online access she credited with benefitting her professional development.

Sometimes the sheer volume of learning resources and the limited hours available brought about innovative solutions. One educator shared listening to recordings at increased speed as a solution. As seen repeatedly in the focus groups, instructors are often the first ones to note the connection between professional development and increased classroom effectiveness.

Participants also pointed out their institutions' roles in that instructional growth dynamic noting, "good educators are good educators because they're supported – they have that backing," and they acknowledge that not everyone has that benefit.

Some "have time every 2 weeks to collaborate with colleagues" which is great for time in the workday provided for PD, but educators admit there is "a certain amount of that [collaboration] time is just connecting and talking and the social aspect of it, as well as collaborating on a project or sharing materials." Workplace book clubs were also cited as an on-the-job learning opportunity.

When asked about the importance of professional development to themselves personally, focus group members spoke at length. One instructor in the visual arts shared the following: "for me it is so deeply heartfelt to be working on my own art projects and to always be looking at other work, so every year, most years, I apply for PD funding to go on an art tour in LA or Toronto or New York and it's stimulating to me as an artist but also as an educator."

Practically speaking, this results in “this log of new information: new artwork, new artists, new practices, new ideas and so it’s so refreshing and exciting and gives [her] surges of energy” upon the return to the classroom. Focus group participants who are instructors in rapidly changing fields such as the computer sciences also point to effective professional development or gaps as what determine their confidence in the classroom.

As one participant shared, “because I do teach tech so it’s a matter of is this what people are using? Are they using this or am I still on the 2016 version where people are not doing that anymore? They’ve all updated, and I try and stay on top of things. It’s a matter of having to see what people are trying to get help with and so I found that the only way that I find that out now is by students coming into my class”. Several participants reported having resigned to identifying the gap in real time and doing self-study between classes.

One instructor pointed to confidence in the educator as a student success way maker, stating “not only does PD help students but it’s also about credibility as an instructor. People recognize I’m certified.” There was also frustration with access to professional development as it pertained to the institution’s expectations of the instructor when it came to promotion and tenure, but especially in teaching institutions, the time allotted did not suffice to meet the expectations. And this is even before deep diving into research or revamping course materials to reflect new learning undertaken.

Access to professional development was perceived to affect career trajectory. One participant pointed out that especially “when you’re looking for work (or promotion or

tenure) or to be viewed as suitable for an opportunity that the expectations have risen so much and as a society we're not acknowledging publicly that in reality you can have this body of work, have this practical know how, and have helped people for a decade or more, but unless you're getting access to that credential, you're going to feel it professionally.”

4.4 Relationship Between Workplace Morale and PD Access

As demonstrated in these focus groups, post-secondary educator participants did not need to be convinced of the importance of professional development because they already know the payoff, which includes everything from students being better prepared for the job market because of their classes to learning efficiencies to help in their own work such as efficient lesson plans thanks to resources such as the provincial instructor's diploma programming.

When it comes together well, it feels like the height of professional practice. As one participant shared, hearing from students about their learning and how it has impacted their lives brings it full circle. She shared that directly from her shared self-study students have reported they now stand out in the workplace and that she could see the direct correlation from her instruction to her students' workplace success.

The participants spoke openly of professional development challenges in the post-secondary sector. They acknowledged access can originate from the instructor's own resources, if need be, but without consistent support that was perceived to only lead to

burnout. They note that it is because of consistent instructor support that students are successful.

As one participant shared, “PD is important because when your cup is full you can pass that on to your students.” And without that support, the results fall short.

As one participant asked, “how can you be good at your job if you’re not being fully supported yourself to fully support your students?” When the access to professional development is inconsistent, it was reported to negatively affect instructional consistency.

When thinking back about a time when her work was more supported by professional development access, one sessional instructor participant shared, “it was really wonderful when I was full time because my year went 2 semesters of teaching and then a semester of art practice, which is in my area that would be called my research, right? And that doesn’t happen anymore. I don’t have that kind of luxury anymore because I have to teach an overload every year which includes summer session in order to make a living wage.” The stress that feeling behind on new information in the sector presents and lack of recharge that professional development provides contributes to make teaching more difficult and prone to burnout. It also made this instructor feel guilty about the learning environment she is able to provide for her students.

She said, “so it does disadvantage my students because I’m not engaged constantly in that practice in the same way” and further clarified that it was not for not caring: “I’m still engaged but it’s in chunks of time. I just don’t have that time anymore.”

Sometimes subject matter expertise makes timely and appropriate professional development elusive.

As we heard more than once from instructors in the computer sciences about timely professional development, “I teach in the tech sector, so there’s not a lot of PD available that can help me [reach] the next level up.” Also often problematic is misalignment between opportunities and funds.

One participant shared the frustration as, “sometimes funding is too low, like \$1500 won’t cover conference travel.” The shortfall in funds was reported to affect some educators more than others. For example, one participant shared that being a single mom also meant daycare costs and increased costs for travel when attending conference professional development.

4.5 The Effect of Open Access Resources on PD Access

For instructors or community practitioners without professional development funding, opportunities were reported to be limited to what can be self-funded. Participants were aware that there might be funding opportunities available but expressed overwhelm on researching how to find and apply for those funds. Participants discussed the need for free university access in Canada as increasingly high school education alone is increasingly not enough to be able to make a baseline living. Such a move would positively affect new graduates as much as it would accomplished professionals in search of ongoing professional development. Where professional development is accessed

without external funding; participants expressed often relying on free courses and books and internet research as well as following news and publications for developments.

One innovative tech instructor said that in addition to the standard academic updates, she also relies on trends in tech which can appear in popular internet feeds so she “even [keeps] an eye out for clickbait articles like *11 things you didn't know you could do in Excel* just to ensure [she's] not missing anything.” It was also recognized by participants that sometimes teaching support at one's home institution can also be a source of professional development.

One participant shared, “when [the pandemic] started we had to pivot very quickly to teaching online which I had never done before and do I feel really proud of myself for recording all of my lectures for accessing. Our technician at the university shot videos of me doing art demonstrations. It was about three months of recording everything to be able to get all that content online, but now it's there and I can reuse it which is fantastic.” Staying relevant with the current trends within a subject area was reported as one of the biggest areas instructors notice whether they are up to date on their professional development.

One participant explained that they experienced a need to constantly update curriculum: “for me it is my knowledge of artists. For me, representation is really important, so queer, trans, black, indigenous, artists of colour. It is important to look at (from term to term) who is my student population and are they being reflected [in the artists we study]?” This means not only learning about new areas of development but also

having the prep time to embed them in the curriculum and find replacement activities and resources where need be.

This participant also shared, “It also turns over so fast so if I’m showing a video that feels a bit dated, that’s not going to capture [the students].” Other participants also shared ways they combined opportunities to meet their professional development needs when there were gaps in access. One was coming together with colleagues to share professional development knowledge and resources. They were eager to share that it is a not lack of willingness that has prevented them from taking part in professional development.

One participant said, “when the institution provides the resources, I can carve out that time to learn.” Other opportunities sometimes presented themselves from other roles the instructors were holding. Some educator participants had permanent staff jobs and were sometimes given more PD opportunities in those roles than in their sessional teaching positions. The participants were able to use these opportunities to enrich their instructional professional development. In some service roles, such as serving on non-profit boards, professional development was available if it complemented the role. For those who were engaged in educationally focused service work, this professional development fit their instructional needs as well. Others, without the formal professional development resources, decided to use their own funding to ensure their professional development access. There was also recognition that this was not always sustainable, that employers sometimes had unrealistic expectations of professional development that

bordered on job training on one's own time, and the hustle culture around academic life came with a risk of burnout.

4.3.1 Prioritization of PD for instructors

Collaborating with post-secondary educators in my day to day work I suspected professional development and instructional growth was important to them. But my initial impressions underestimated how much they cared about professional development and its impact. Each participant recognized professional development as a key priority. Each approached it as best they could given their access. Each recognized the need to be relevant to their students. Many participants expressed being conscious of the role of post-secondary education in society as a leader in positive change. All reported caring deeply about their work and their students' success.

4.4 Other Approaches to Professional Development Access

Participants shared other approaches to professional development when the resources were not available. One of the most frequently mentioned approaches was professional sharing whether in a formalized way such as time designated during the work week to do so or while completing other work such as meeting for articulation meetings. It became clear in the focus group discussions that the instructors' professional development radars are up looking proactively for new approaches and opportunities and when a colleague mentioned a successful approach or something new they've tried, others expressed interest to follow suit.

One participant revealed that in, “sharing our skills and knowledge with others, we learn from each other. It’s critical to upgrade our own skills and upgrade what we’re doing for students.” Sometimes that includes collaboration between instructors in different subject areas. For example, the Adult Basic Education Association of British Columbia brings together instructors teaching upgrading and university preparation, adult basic education, English as an additional language, continuing education, and community literacy. In the focus groups, collegiality was mentioned time and again with the recognition that it is exciting to work together, commiserate over challenges, pose solutions, and mentor newer colleagues.

Less accessible, but also mentioned, was research as professional development. As previously mentioned, this was a less popular choice with instructors at teaching intensive universities, and even less attainable in fields of increased student contact hours (upgrading, trades, healthcare), and even less available to sessional instructors working in those fields, making lower wages necessitating teaching more sections.

Another participant who spent most of her career in small northern Canadian communities pointed out the educational access divide between central and remote locations because of the cost of transportation. Many conferences, workshops, and meetings were out of reach financially. Even the time needed to travel caused a burden. It was acknowledged that post-pandemic, online and hybrid options have eased this access somewhat.

4.5 Relationship Between Faculty Retention and PD Access

Professional development, especially when supported by the institution with time off and away from the teaching setting, was cited as a major sustainer of instructor capacity. Professional development as professional renewal was reported as a driving source of energy for many of the participants.

One participant shared, “With regard to preventing burnout in my 19-year career, I saw that instructors who used their PD seemed to be happier in the job, maybe not to completely avoid the risk of burnout, but [at least] prevent a state of constant burnout.” Another participant pointed out that it improves instructor confidence when they have opportunities to engage regularly in professional development, which can enable the educator to be more effective in the classroom and to be a greater asset to their colleagues. During the pandemic, instructors noticed the missing space where getting away to learn used to be.

“We used to take conferences to take a holiday and learn at the same time, just to be in a different space of mind,” shared one participant. They discussed how an anticipated annual conference held at the end of the academic year rejuvenated them and how compassion fatigue could get the best of them if they did not get that break, especially if teaching students with multiple barriers. They spoke to the practical aspects of regularly becoming learners to better meet the needs of their students.

One participant explained, “Some of the learning is formatted so when we as instructors become learners, we get to know what difficulties our real students face when

they are studying online.” The sudden move to both access professional development and teach online in the pandemic showed instructors the barriers their students were likely experiencing and allowed them to address them. This factored into activities such as course and lesson planning but also into instructional approaches and attitudes.

After one participant shared that based on her difficulties in her online courses, she took the time when planning her online course to “make sure students do not face those types of difficulties,” it prompted another focus group member to share her shift as instructor. “I had such compassion for my students because I wasn’t doing well online,” she said, “I had to figure it out. How do I get my act together? How do I do this? I’d come into my class and say to my students: I know how you’re feeling a little bit, because this is what I’m feeling.” They acknowledged that it was the act of experiencing learning through professional development that allowed instructional growth to happen.

“It brought about a conversation about learning about learning that my students would not have access to if I was not sharing,” a participating instructor realized. This, they agreed, was not something that could be gained another way.

As one professor shared, “the compassion you learned for your students being a student, I don’t think we can get that out of a book or out of a classroom teaching “to which her peer acknowledged, “we need to experience it to know it.” Among the changes to classroom approach reported were flexibility in the time given for completing an assignment, proactively talking with the students about time management, and including assignment timelines into the syllabus shared on the first day of class.

This professional development experience focused on format was transformational. Participants reported becoming more flexible, empowering their students to decide how best to fit the expectations into their schedule, and the importance of reassurance to students that the stress they're feeling on this steep learning curve is temporary and that they will adapt. One instructor has even gone beyond the syllabus with the intention of building this reassurance into her first lesson of the semester.

“From my learning in my PD, it's the first lesson I teach my students every term now because it means so much to them: mindset, mindfulness, and metacognition,” she shared with her focus group. She explains that getting her students to self-reflect in the way she was taught to in her professional development goes a long way to their persistence and success.

She asks them, “What mindset are you coming in with? If it's growth, great. If it's fixed, let's work on that. What do you think? What do you think right now? How are you thinking about it?” She also includes an activity for sharing with the class at the end of the reflection journaling time. It is not just in student persistence issues that professional development helps the instructor better connect to the student experience. This instructor also shared that in the juggle of her work and family obligations, she had to drop one of her professional development classes. Struggling with this made her realize what her students were going through when they were overwhelmed by life and needed to prioritize to stay well and balanced.

She said the result of her discovery was that by “also learning as a teacher and having to drop a course due to family issues [meant knowing she could] help students be comfortable with that.” It is both the learning and the life integration of that learning that is key to student success.

One instructor who works with adult basic education students talked about the soft skills/hard skills balance: “there’s that spirit of learning and love of learning and passion to teach student learning... we have to teach them how to learn on their own and we’re here to support them as adults.” The caring for the students beyond entries in the grade book means the instructors find ways to support their learning journey.

As one professor employed in the sciences shared, “I wrote a small article, not just for publishing but to help my students with the tips that I have to make learning easier for them.” Multiple instructors participating in this particular focus group resonated with the experience of finding that their students were successful directly from what they themselves had learned from professional development. They reported that students told them about finding it easier to learn after receiving the tips and also shared those additional topics such as attention management which made an impact when discussed with students. Because of spotting this direct correlation, it now influences the instructors’ professional development approach.

Instructors said things like “when prioritizing PD, I select those activities that I can share with my students as a learner,” and “what I think is: how is this activity going to help my students when I grow as an instructor?” and “so whatever activity I do, I make

a point that I learned something from it and I can pass it to my learners.” This engagement shows that when instructors are well-supported with professional development resources, they are often first looking to bolster student success. This may be of interest to institutions looking to improve student success and retention. Professional development is a natural fit for educators sold on the value of learning at all stages of life. Especially for adult basic educators and community literacy workers, who see many mature students in their classrooms, PD just makes good sense both from a role modelling perspective and a best practice focus.

One participant shared the tendency to keep learning as: “I think that practice of learning and getting involved with associations and places that value the learning seems to be a path that once we get into part of the lifelong learning, we keep doing it wherever.”

Another pointed to professional development as a component of her teaching philosophy, saying that professional development both “fits my passion and feeds my compassion [both needed] because that’s what I bring to my class along with my patience. I want to be inspired. I want to be motivated and I want to challenge my weaknesses.” Important persistence lessons from learning are the basic ones that instructors want for their students.

Another instructor participant shared, “I want them to learn from their mistakes because I’m learning from my mistakes.” The learner growth that professional development brings out makes a natural connection point for faculty to connect to student

learning barriers. Professional development was also cited as keeping the practice of teaching fresh.

One engaged instructor participant shared, “There’s new things happening so I want to pull things from all over and I will write my own material to keep updating and that’s what makes me excited about going to PD.” Not only does that practice of renewing the curriculum benefit her as an educator but she attests to “[seeing] my students growing in a way I wouldn’t if I didn’t do PD.”

4.6 Relationships Between Workload and PD access

While instructors widely agree on the benefits of professional development in their classrooms, in practice their teaching load and institutional scheduling of professional development often do not mesh. Instructors spoke of the barriers of a series of workshops being delivered in a specific time slot which can turn out to be the same hours as one’s teaching obligations. They acknowledged that in some cases, recordings of the workshops could be accessed after the event. But with recordings, professional development is reduced to the equivalent of watching a good YouTube tutorial, without the benefit of asking questions that arise during the content or asking about personalized teaching situations.

When instructors are accessing professional development only in a 20-day window following the academic year, their access is limited to what is available during that time. Often it means they are accessing professional development at an institution outside of Canada and missing out on Canadian context. There also often exists a gap in

understanding of experience to how this impacts the front-line educator and their classroom. This creates resentment.

One participant shared that it felt like that, “the universities are not pulling their weight.” This is especially true when the institution’s communicated values include a piece that will require additional learning to accomplish. An all-too-common example is the performative encouragement for the institution to Indigenize without a change in the resources allocated. The educators, especially at teaching intensive institutions, some like ABE instructors, teaching double the student contact hours than their university-transfer colleagues, want to participate, but have limited professional development options to do so.

The gap between the needs of the Canadian classroom and the resources allotted to meeting them means that likely Canadian post-secondary institutions will need to, as one participant shared, “look at reprioritizing different things.” This will likely only become clear if institutions are information-gathering on the state of the classroom in a grassroots approach and are less likely to happen if a disconnected top-down communication of initiatives is the approach pursued. Without hearing what the impact of the institution’s current professional development policies are, Canadian university administrators will be in the dark as to the realities educators and their students at their institutions face.

What participants really reported wanting in the focus groups is to be able to take several days off when an especially compelling professional development topic appeared.

They hoped for the support from their employer, an efficient and timely application process, and internal resources that developed their career from a growth approach, not a one-and-done information delivery model. They want the resources available to match up with what is being asked of them. One participant pointed out the irony of institutions not covering international conference fees when participating in them is what is needed for tenure and promotion. They spoke of the impractical nature of trying to fit in professional development over the lunch break between teaching obligations. They spoke of not having the opportunity to deep dive into a subject because of the way professional development was currently delivered at their institutions.

When equity issues compound the barriers to professional development, the observer begins to see the systemic privileges being upheld for some at the detriment of others. If the only way to get ahead is to fund the learning curves yourself, it is likely Canadian post-secondary institutions will end up at the tenured track finish line with a homogenized group of privileged individuals. At universities and colleges where a large percentage of faculty members are without permanent positions, all kinds of pressure emerge to perform like the resources are in place even when they're not, to the benefit of the institution and at the disadvantage of the precariously employed. One most unfortunate example presented was an institution which was promoting a minor in equity studies and the faculty member putting it together was un-resourced, non-permanent, and a member of an equity seeking group. It is a blatant example of universities not walking out values and excusing it on budget restrictions.

4.7 PD that is not a fit for the instructor's expertise and focus

Sometimes from service or prior knowledge or community engagement, part time educators or community literacy workers might be farther in their understanding than currently offered PD is in topics such as indigenization or trauma informed practice. Sometimes the speed of progress of the field also presents a challenge for professional development for instructors who are expected to address those updates in their teaching to help their students meet the demands of the workplace upon graduation. Without ready access to that professional development, it was reported by participants to place them behind colleagues in the same field. They reported often having to do self-study before class just to keep up with the pace of student learning and demand. One participant, a computer information systems instructor, shared that when in class students list various computer expectations of them at work they are having trouble with new software or technology which prompted her to go home and research that in the following three days so that she could meet that learning need in the following class. She said she would prefer to have opportunities to get that kind of professional development proactively and not reactively.

4.8 The importance of allowing for enough time for transformational PD topics

When it came to engaging with transformational PD topics, participants mentioned feeling at a lack of time for engaging. Without support, instructors reported the risk of feeling unconfident in meeting the new expectations of the classroom.

As one instructor shared, “It feels like PD is necessary, but that there’s not always recognition of how much time it takes to do.” The time for the learning is not the only demand of the instructor. Often the professional development applications systems in place do not allow for enough flexibility to access when opportunities that fit their needs arise without weeks of prior notice. Across the focus groups, educator participants reported pain points with the professional development application and process. Some resort to accessing them with their own time and resources. They reported finding and self-funding mini learning opportunities as there’s not enough formal funding processing time to apply to those funds, which would traditionally require notice of a couple of months in advance.

4.9 Research approaches to Professional Development

Within the focus groups, several instructors with research experience, advised other participants to pursue research as a way of simultaneously meeting professional development and scholarly activity expectations. One approach cited was to apply for a research release to get professional development in research form. The limitation of this approach is that initially the research release application process itself requires training to access successfully. This was acknowledged as bringing instructors back to where they started and furthers the gap of privilege. For instructors with extra resources, support, and capacity, such as those with permanent positions, their future research as professional development practice will increase their future capacity exponentially, increasing the disadvantage their colleagues without the employment permanency or resources face in comparison.

Frustration with post-secondary sector mixed messaging around both professional development and scholarly activity arose in the focus groups. For those trying to meet the expectations of their workplace without practical support in place, the process negatively impacted both their workload demands and feelings of reduced self-efficacy. This was acknowledged both in the groups and in the literature (Hall et al., 2019) as contributing to the likelihood of burnout.

Participants cited examples of rejected research funding applications without constructive feedback to attend to next time. They mentioned the expectation that one's collaboration on the application would exist outside of one's local institution without access to the conference funds that would allow for that. The gap in research process mentorship in their departments was also a concern.

Chapter 5 Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

Participants across all the focus groups cited free webinars as the most common approach to meet professional development needs without resources. Some participants reported that they were frustrated with knowledge that their institutions often reported professional development funds surplus year to year. At the same time restrictions, such as low individual financial caps on accessing funds and requirements to pay for the professional development up-front and be reimbursed later, added to the application approval process demands and timeline that often did not make access attainable.

5.1 Conclusions

The new ideas that emerged from the study to add to the literature of professional development in post-secondary education were the variety of experiences of post-secondary educators. Not treating post-secondary educators as a monolith allows for the nuance of privilege and equity to be discussed and addressed. The participating post-secondary educators were candid about their challenges in accessing professional development and connected those barriers to reduced performance in the classroom compared to times when they did have access and felt more effective as a result. Supporting the discussion of challenges arising from barriers, other participants accessing professional development more readily also underlined its positive effects on their classroom performance, giving strength to the barred educators' testimony that not having access incurred a lack of this positive effect. The key themes that emerged from

the study that affected post-secondary educators' access to professional development are represented in the Figure 3.1

Figure 3.1 Determinants of Post-Secondary Educators' Access to Professional Development

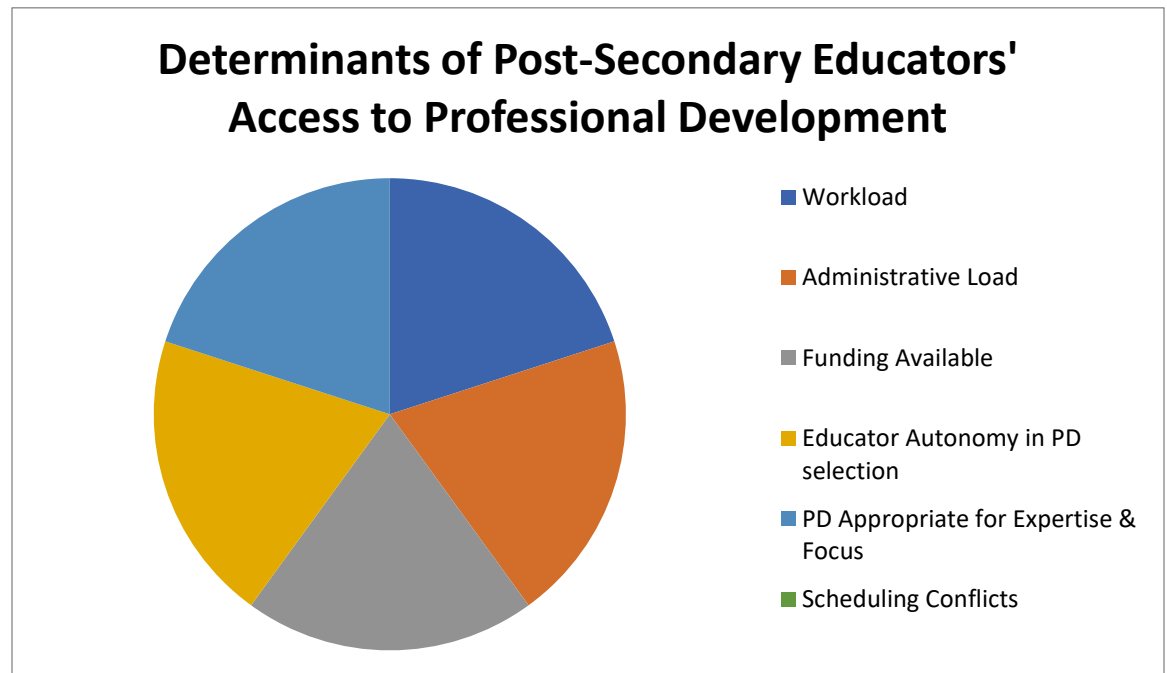


Figure 3.1 Determinants of Post-Secondary Educators Access to Professional Development

5.2 Scope and Limitations

This study was carried out to examine professional development access for post-secondary faculty but it focused primarily on access for a) precariously employed individuals, b) educators serving students faced with barriers to access and success, and c) faculty with teaching-intensive workloads due to the nature of their program subject matter. The scope of this study encompasses the experiences, behaviours, and attitudes of

post-secondary faculty and their community partner educators when it comes to professional development access and engagement.

Participants were selected both by invitation by way of email list and by personal referral through network contacts of the several large organizations based in British Columbia. This represents a research limitation in terms of representation because it is possible that faculty members who lack access to professional development time may also lack access to the time needed to participate in focus groups of this sort. It is also possible that participation in the focus groups may have been limited by the personal referral process.

For example, it is conceivable that the faculty participant who is above average successful in securing professional development opportunities may also associate with colleagues who do the same. These individuals may not be able to reflect on or relate to the barriers to accessing professional development that other colleagues may face. I attempted to mitigate the effects of these limitations by encouraging a “contribute what you can” invitation, which was intended to reduce barriers to participation. The focus group sessions themselves were a typical workshop length at 1-2 hours in duration.

I attempted to mitigate the effects of the time zone limitations by holding focus groups at both daytime and evening hours within the Pacific Standard Time (PST) time zone. I hoped that this would increase the likelihood that potential participants from other time zones would find overlap between their daytime and evening availability. It is possible that advertising focus groups in the PST time zone posed a limitation for Canadian faculty and community education partners from other time zones. Because most

interest arose from educators on the West coast of Canada, it is possible that the experiences shared are localized to that geographic area of the country.

I also note that in the past three years of service as a Vice-President of Member Engagement for my home institution's faculty and staff association, I have had the privilege of accessing networking and professional development activities under that role. In that capacity I have found that educators across Canada face a variety of institutional stresses in common and what I heard in the focus groups made up of educators on the west coast of Canada was similar in nature to the concerns I heard from faculty members across Canada.

While the group of participants is relatively small at under 20 participants and all from the South and West coasts of British Columbia, they represent a variety of private and public educational settings across six different organizations. Despite the study's limitations, the results of the focus groups provide important information about how post-secondary policy makers could meet the current needs of universities, faculty, and students as they emerge. They could also provide insights into how to support faculty professional development access while waiting on structural change by identifying ways in which faculty are already accessing professional development in innovative ways. The generalizations arising could lead to improvements in professional development parameters and access across the sector.

5.3 Most common barriers to professional development reported

The majority of participants saw the administrative processes and restrictions involved in professional development applications as counterproductive which one participant summed up as, “too little of conference fees are covered [and] the other thing that doesn’t make sense is that there are PD funds left over each year.” One professional development approach which helped to meet a limited number of demands was incorporating peer review and open education authorship opportunities and reporting this for professional development. These opportunities came up inconsistently dependent on calls for proposals and funding available and were more often reported after the fact instead of included on professional development plans for those fortunate enough to be presented with them.

Time demands notwithstanding, the convenience of asynchronous massive open online courses was cited as the most convenient source of professional development. Another sustainable solution for learning cited was professional learning networks. This was especially the case around social justice focused professional development with emerging resources such as anti-racism, decolonization, and indigenization. In these professional networks, educators can contribute articles, podcasts, books, articles, and other resources to the group recommendations and then have a group webinar to discuss. While this approach may have gained educators new knowledge that helped their practice, such professional development was reported as only met partial reporting demands and as not reliably recognized by university employers.

5.4 Recommendations arising out of the grounded theory approach

The answers to questions about professional development access barriers arose naturally through the focus groups in the grounded theory process which online interview researcher Scott (2012) describes as “exploratory” and further explains that “for the grounded theorist, therefore, it is essential not to know beforehand, not to impose an issue on the participants but rather to listen, to hear, what the participants themselves consider to be the main issue” (p. 87-88).

The recommendations included:

1. Self-enrolled professional development funds without restriction;
2. Allocation of professional development funds per faculty member that can be accessed when opportunities arise without multi-step application processes prior (reports can come afterwards);
3. Supporting research to be a part of professional development activities;
4. Support professional development as a work activity authorized during the workday;
5. Expanding the definition of professional development to include professional learning networks; and
6. Expanding the professional development funds access to be able to use several years worth of the funding allocation at once or bank it for future access.

5.5 Findings to initially posed questions

1. What professional development resources are Canadian post-secondary sessional faculty typically able to access to support their work?

Typically, Canadian post-secondary sessional faculty can access a professional development fund that primarily covers part of the cost of the professional development itself. This goes farther if it is applied to local or online workshops; however, it often does not come close if applied to conference and travel expenses. Additionally, sessional instructors do not have a clear avenue for attending professional development that may only be offered during their teaching hours. It is a matter of both classroom replacements not being in place as well as the frequency of, given their lower salaries, teaching additional classes to meet their living expenses.

2. Of these resources, which are most effective in aiding with instructional strategy?

The resources that are most effective in aiding with instructional strategy are targeted to the instructor's subject area and research interests. When limiting professional development to a specific time period or topic, this opportunity is missed. Practically speaking, it helps instructors to access professional development if the application for applying for funds is uncomplicated and timely, has an option for advance funds, and can respond to opportunities that arise without much notice. Asynchronous online learning is the least disruptive to the juggle of the instructors' other obligations at work and home.

3. Of these resources, which are most effective in aiding with scholarly pursuits?

Professional development that focuses on developing the instructor's research expertise is directly beneficial to scholarly pursuits. Here, mentoring relationships are valued over one-off workshops on topics such as research funding or release applications, the practicalities of fitting research in on top of one's teaching load and understanding the nuances of the pursuit.

4. What relationships exist between instructor workload and the types of professional development resources they access?

The less flexibility an instructor has from their workload, the more they require it from their professional development. Being able to work at one's own pace, access recorded material and engage in discussion boards with classmates at odd hours all increase the likelihood of completion and reduce stress. This makes asynchronous online courses the preferred front-runner.

5. What relationships exist between workplace morale and support and the types of professional development resources they access?

Professional development improves both the instructor's resilience and efficacy. The experience of learning itself increases their empathy for students and helps them to spot their learning pain points in a way that an academic who has not engaged in regular professional development following the acquisition of their credentials would not have access to. It also has a hand in preventing burnout as the instructor remembers why they

got into this work in the first place, is excited by new learnings, and has a positive classroom experience when they share ‘cutting edge’ information with their classes.

6. How has the availability of open-source professional development resources or professional development funds (of any size) affected levels of professional development engagement?

When the funding opportunity for PD is there, many instructors will avail themselves of it. Where funds are under-utilized, the barriers are usually a cumbersome application process, a large lead time requirement, and limitations on when professional development can be undertaken. Open-source professional development resources are more likely to be engaged with if they are of interest to the instructor, assist them with changing student needs, or are recognized by their institution.

5.4 Research Implications

As previously outlined, based on this study, and because of the increasing economic pressures facing post-secondary educators and their students today, it is recommended that further research be conducted:

- a) to better understand the impact of instructor’s professional development access on student success and retention;
- b) to better develop recommendations of best practices of professional development for the sector with a lens to equity and fiscal responsibility; and

- c) to examine the role of professional development access and supports in the post-secondary career trajectories of equity deserving groups.

It is my hope that this study examining professional development access for Canadian post-secondary educators in British Columbia gives more voice to the post-secondary educator in today's multi-pressured working environment, sheds light on the challenges they face in professional development access, and provides rationale for the expansion of professional development opportunities to improve working conditions and student success outcomes. As both the literature and post-secondary educator anecdote demonstrate, those faculty members with professional development access, support, and a measure of autonomy put those PD opportunities to good use and increased morale and retention result. For the success of our educators and the learning of our students, I look forward to the resulting conversations around these themes and the policies those conversations may affect as a result.

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Appendix 1

Study Introduction Letter

May 1, 2021

Suzy Jones
Apt #104 – 25790 Direct Street
Vancouver BC, V6H 3C1

Dear Suzy Jones,

You have indicated your willingness to participate in a focus group conducted by British Columbia University to collect your insights and experiences as they pertain to professional development access for Canadian post-secondary faculty and community and workplace educators.

These focus groups are taking place across educational settings (post-secondary and its community partners) Five to ten people will attend the consultation through a private online platform. We will use all the privacy settings to make sure that the consultation is private by using a password and only allowing actual participants into the meeting.

By participating in this research, you may learn new information as well as help make strides for professional development access for post-secondary educators and community partners across Canada.

Prior to beginning the focus group session, we will be asking you to complete a short demographic survey. Your name will not be associated with this short survey and any combination of information that could be used to identify you will not be presented together in reports or presentations to protect your confidentiality.

Canadian and international research regarding professional development access and its determinants will be presented at the beginning of the focus group. After the overview, I will ask you to discuss your perceptions about the current research, explore whether it aligns with your experience with professional development access or not, and what you perceive to be the gaps in professional development research in Canada, and how the current research and study's findings could be transformed into action within post-secondary education in Canada.

This is a confidential process. Your participation puts you at absolutely no risk and you are free to decline or withdraw at any time without consequence.

Thank you for your participation.
Sincerely,
Michelle Vandepol
Lead Researcher

Professional Development Access for Canadian Post-Secondary Educators and its Determinants

[student email]

For information about ethical issues or concerns, please contact the Memorial University Research Ethics Committee at [institutional email]

Appendix 2

Informed Consent Letter

May 1, 2021

Suzy Jones
Apt #104 – 25790 Direct Street
Vancouver BC, V6H 3C1

Dear Suzy Jones,

You have indicated your willingness to participate in a focus group conducted by British Columbia University to collect your insights and experiences as they pertain to professional development access for Canadian post-secondary faculty and community and workplace educators. These focus groups are taking place across educational settings (post-secondary and its community partners) In each focus group, five to ten people will attend through an online platform. We will use all the privacy settings to make sure that the consultation is private by using a session-specific password and only allowing actual participants into the focus group session.

Prior to beginning the focus group session, we will be asking you to complete a short online demographic survey through the Canadian platform Simple Survey. Your name will not be associated with this short survey and any combination of information that could be used to identify you will not be presented together in reports or presentations to protect your confidentiality.

Canadian and international research regarding professional development access and its determinants will be presented at the beginning of the focus group. After the overview, I will ask you to discuss your perceptions about the current research, explore whether it aligns with your experience with professional development access or not, and what you perceive to be the gaps in professional development research in Canada, and how the current research and study's findings could be transformed into action within post-secondary education in Canada.

Due to the topic of discussion, experiential knowledge may be shared. I will ask that everyone in the group be respectful of participant confidentiality. You should be aware that in a small group-discussion, your anonymity and the confidentiality of the information you provide cannot be assured. Please care for your own confidentiality as to your comfort level. Leaving out identifying employer names and departments is advised. If you have additional details you would like to submit after the focus group that you did not feel comfortable sharing in the focus group, feel free to submit them to the lead researcher at [student email].

You are free to leave the focus group at any time, although I will be unable to withdraw your demographic information and contributions to the group discussions after the group has started because your name will not be identified in either the survey or the group transcript. By attending the focus group and participating in the discussion you are giving consent to be a part of this project. By consenting, you have not waived any rights to legal recourse in the event of research related harm. Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Michelle Vandepol, Lead Researcher

Professional Development Access for Canadian Post-Secondary Educators and its Determinants
[student email] For information about ethical issues or concerns, please contact the Memorial University Research Ethics Committee at [institutional email]

Appendix 3

Demographic Survey Questions and Precoded Responses

What is your gender?	1= woman 2= man 3= non-binary 4= prefer not to disclose 5= prefer to self describe (if the self-describe option is selected, a text box opens up)
What is your age?	1= 21 to 25 years old 2= 26 to 30 years old 3= 31 to 35 years old 4= 36 to 40 years old 5= 41 to 45 years old 6= 46 to 50 years old 7= 51 to 55 years old 8= 56 to 60 years old 9= over 60 years old
What best describes your employment?	1= early career, non-permanent faculty 2= early career, permanent faculty

- 3= mid career, non-permanent faculty
 - 4= mid career, permanent faculty
 - 5= late career, non-permanent faculty
 - 6= late career, permanent faculty
 - 7= part-time employment, community education
 - 8= full-time employment, community education
 - 9= part-time employment, workplace education
 - 10=full-time employment, workplace education
 - 11= prefer to self describe
- (if the self-describe option is selected, a text box opens up)

What best describes your access to PD?

- 1= in-house PD
- 2= partial PD pro-rated for part-time employment
- 3= full PD associated with full-time employment
- 4= partial PD with access to supplementary funds
- 5= full PD associated with full-time employment
- 6= self-directed, self-funded PD

Appendix 4

Focus Group Questions

- 1) What are your perceptions about the current research on professional development access as presented?
- 2) Does it align with your experience with professional development access?
- 3) What do you perceive to be the gaps in professional development research in Canada?
- 4) What limitations currently face your access to ongoing professional development?
- 5) Have you experienced burnout related to a lack of professional supports in the last five years?
- 6) Describe the various ways you have accessed professional development.
- 7) What does professional development mean to you?
- 8) What examples can you give of your professional development's impact on students?
- 9) How have you incorporated knowledge from professional development in your instruction?
- 10) What would you pursue in the way of professional development if your funds were increased?
- 11) How have you pursued professional development without a cost to yourself if funds were not available (i.e. MOOCs, in-house development)?
- 12) Have you contributed to others' professional development (i.e.. free community workshops, conference presentations --with or without honorarium, in-house PD facilitation)

13) How could the current research and this study's findings be transformed into action within post-secondary education in Canada?

14) Anything else you want the researcher to know?



POST-SECONDARY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACCESS



AND WHY IT MATTERS FOR STUDENTS & INSTRUCTORS ALIKE

MICHELLE VANDEPOL
RESEARCH OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

*Or why we should care
about professional
development access*



Post-secondary education is a powerful tool in the fight against poverty. Many Canadians that find themselves trying to raise families on the earnings of one or more minimum wage jobs are doing so because other opportunities are not open to them because of a lack of a credential.

In order to have access and support through the programs they need, students need the support of informed and engaged faculty.

Ill-preparedness to meet students' challenges is a draining situation for post-secondary educators.

Professional development meets the needs of both students and faculty.

WHAT INSTRUCTORS SAID ABOUT

instructor access
to professional
development

1 ACCESS

2 ENGAGEMENT

3 SUCCESS

& ITS
IMPACT ON
STUDENTS

IMPACT ON INSTRUCTORS

Self efficacy,
effectiveness, and
retention

The literature shows that educators who feel ill-equipped for their role or workload become measurably less competent.



In contrast, educators who are mentored, resourced, and supported have superior outcomes.

Addressing professional development access has a correlation with avoiding burnout as well.

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACTS

- Quality of Student Engagement

Student stakes are high when you take into consideration student debt loads, the tradeoff between time making money to time in education, as well the risk to graduating with a credential, but without the skills employers are looking for that are not taught in high-stress time-starved learning environments.

- Sustainability of Instruction

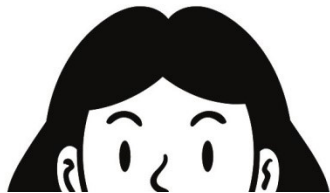
Instructor stakes are high when you think about the expectations of post-secondary institutions, students, and receiving employers. It is a risk that the focus will be to address the needs of one of the stakeholder groups and the expense of the others or at one's own wellbeing, which results in an unsustainable working environment.

- Best Practices & Results

Providing educators with the best resources, opportunities, and experiences to feel confident meeting student needs in a relevant way is a positive and sustainable outcome for everyone.



LITERATURE REVIEW THEMES



ACCESS

Barriers to Post-Secondary Education - Canadian Millenium Scholarship Foundation (2007). Voices in the Education Margins - Danaher & Mulligan (2020), Morris (2019), and NEADS (2018).

SUSTAINABILITY

Post-secondary needs . Canadian Council on Learning (2009), (2011) . The wellbeing of Canadians - Cdn Index of Wellbeing (2016). Job demands & burnout - Demerouti et al (2001), Hall et al (2019), McInerney et al (2012), Sevunts (2019), and Novaes et al (2018).. Responsibilities of workplace culture in higher ed - Feldman & Paulsen (1999), Kuchinke (2002), and Lee (2001)

INNOVATION

New solutions (Busch, 2020). Expanding PD parameters - Douglas (2018) and ATA (2021). The post-pandemic workplace - Galvez (2020) . Campus based developments - Wilson et al (2015). Workplace Innovations - OECD (2020).

LET'S RESEARCH AND ANALYZE

What do instructors currently have access to?

Have you experienced burnout in the last 5 years?

What are the challenges in accessing PD?

What does professional development mean to you?

What self-identified solutions are instructors coming up with?

What examples of your professional development impacts on students can you share?