ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe teachers’ perspectives regarding career-stage appropriateness of professional growth opportunities offered in one countywide school system in southeastern United States. Symbolic interactionism was the theoretical framework of the study, and the methodology was grounded theory. Face-to-face interviews were the primary data source. Constant comparative analysis was used to analyze the data and to generate theory grounded in the data.

Data revealed that teachers interviewed for this study believed that career-stage appropriate professional learning is designed around three elements. The teachers believed that professional learning is career-stage appropriate when the participants are able to choose the content of their learning. The teachers also believed that professional learning is career-stage appropriate when it is delivered by an experienced educator. Finally, the teachers believed that career-stage appropriate professional learning uses active engagement as the primary delivery method. The study also revealed that in order for professional learning specialists to design career-stage appropriate professional
learning, they must consider not only the characteristics of adult learning but also many other areas of adult development. Implications for future research are discussed, and implications for practitioners, as well as for higher education, are presented.

INDEX WORDS: Professional learning, Career stages, Career-stage appropriate.
TEACHERS’ PERSPECTIVES OF CAREER-STAGE
APPROPRIATENESS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PROGRAMS

By

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DEDICATION

For many Italian immigrants, getting an education helped turn the American Dream into a reality. My family was no different. More important than attaining “the dream,” however, is family. So when, as a young man, my father was summoned home from flight school to learn the third generation family business, he did so without second thoughts and relinquished his dream. Family obligations came first.

Almost 30 years ago, I started working on my master’s degree. When I became pregnant with my first child, I discontinued my studies and focused on my new family. When I explained to my dad that I would lose the credits I had already earned toward my degree, he told me that an education was never lost. I started over on my master’s degree in 1998 and completed it 2000. Now in 2007, I have completed my doctorate.

I started on my doctorate in 2003, and there were times I thought I’d never complete it. However, I reminded myself of my dad’s words and kept working to make my dream a reality. Sadly, I lost my dad to cancer several years ago. But I have never lost his support and confidence.

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I have been blessed to have the prayers, support, and encouragement of many important people in my life while working through the doctoral process. I happen to know that stock in votive candles has increased tremendously. My colleagues, friends, and family were patient with me when I shied away from committees rather than volunteering for them, fired off curt emails instead of returning phone calls, or ordered Chinese takeout instead of cooking dinner. Fortunately, none of us is worse for the wear!

Thanks to Doctors Jo and Joe Blase who picked me out of a crowd and suggested I pursue my doctorate. It is entirely possible that, along the way, they questioned their initial judgment, but they never gave up on me.

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CHAPTER 1
OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Introduction

According to the National Staff Development Council (NSDC), professional learning programs are “essential to creating schools in which all students and staff members are learners who continually improve their performance” (Sparks & Hirsch, 1997, p. 4). Improving teacher quality usually does improve student achievement. However, because not all teachers are at the same stage in their careers, they have different professional needs. If these needs are ignored, student achievement might be less than optimal. Better teaching and increased learning can occur when teachers are appropriately trained. Reaching these goals requires meeting teachers’ professional learning needs associated with their current career stage. Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch, and Enz (2000) stated, “In order to sustain teacher development, administrators must support the growth process by addressing unique needs of teachers operating at different phases” (p. 23).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe teachers’ perspectives of the career-stage appropriateness of professional growth opportunities offered in a county-wide school system in the southeastern United States. The research question was “what are teachers’ perspectives of the career-stage appropriateness of their formal professional learning programs?” The intent was to discover more specifically teachers’ beliefs,
reactions, and attitudes toward their formal professional learning programs (i.e., whether formal professional learning programs meet teachers’ developmental needs).

Background of the Study

Research suggests that a comprehensive professional learning program intended to foster professional growth (Smyth, 1991) is needed as teachers successfully progress across the stages of a teaching career (Janas, 2001). Indeed, teachers’ own statements reveal diverse professional learning expectations and needs ranging from stipends (“Sure I’ll do it; there’s a stipend, isn’t there?”) to content (“I can use this in my classroom to meet my students’ developmental needs.”).

Studying these teacher needs, Unruh and Turner (1970) identified stages through which teachers progress (i.e., the initial teaching period, the period of building security, and the period of maturity). In *Teacher Career Stages: Implications for Staff Development*, Burke, Christensen, and Fessler (1984) more closely defined and illustrated the teacher career cycle as a progression; specifically, they found that teachers go through identifiable career stages including pre-service, induction, competency building, enthusiasm and growth, career frustration, stability and stagnancy, career wind-down, and career exit. Similarly, Fuller and Brown (1969) designed the “Teacher Concerns Questionnaire,” which identified clusters of concerns (i.e., concerns about self, task concerns, and concerns regarding impact of instruction) at various stages of teacher development. In essence, these and other related studies on the necessity of stage-appropriate professional learning opportunities (e.g., Newman, Burden, & Applegate, 1980) established that “teaching is a lifelong journey of learning rather than a final destination of ‘knowing’ how to teach” (McRobbie, 2000, p. 6).
In addition, other research has determined that several factors, such as extent of classroom experience, strain, and gender, can influence this lifelong journey. Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2001) noted that with experience, teacher focus shifts from “I” to “my group” to “all students” (p. 76). Sikes, Measor, and Woods (1985) discussed both positive and negative strain in relation to “critical incidents” in teachers’ professional lives and their effects on pivotal professional decisions (p. 105). An example of positive strain is the anticipation of a newborn into a family. However, that same anticipation can cause negative strain if the mother-to-be is worried about putting the infant in daycare while teaching. These types of strain could influence how a teacher reacts to the opening of a new school to relieve the overcrowding of another school. This same teacher would have to decide whether to transfer to the new school. The negative and positive strains can impact the teacher’s decision, for the demands of a career move at this time could alter the teacher’s personal life. Accepting or declining this transfer could change the teacher’s entire professional life and development; these life-altering events have been classified by Sikes et al. (1985) as “personal, intrinsic, and extrinsic” and identified as factors that have profound effects on teacher’s professional development (p. 106). Billingsley (1993) noted that career stages in men and women are “gender differentiated” (p. 12); social mores, such as the roles of women (e.g., first-time mothers), warrant consideration when integrating stage development theories into comprehensive professional learning plans.

Research on teacher growth and development has also confirmed the need for professional learning opportunities that reflect the design and implementation preferences of adult learners in an effective learning environment. Regardless of the content material,
central factors to consider when creating a professional learning plan are the learning needs of the audience. Malcolm Knowles (1980), the father of adult learning theory, acknowledged that adults learn differently from children and defined “andragogy” as the “art and science of helping adults learn” (p. 39). In later work, Knowles (1984) confirmed that adults are a learning community with specific needs. Cross (1981) also revealed patterns of adult learning and development, how adults learn, and how adults want to learn. In essence, this research shows that adults choose to learn in learning environments tailored to their needs (Billingsley, 1993). Finally, as articulated in the current National Staff Development Council Standards (2000), professional learning encourages teacher development when its design incorporates knowledge about human learning and change.

Statement of the Problem

Unfortunately, professional learning programs often fail to meet teachers’ developmental needs (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989). Current research provides no guidelines linking career stages to teacher needs. A personalized support system (with respect to professional learning) has yet to be established for teachers at various stages of their careers (Fessler, 1995). One missing area of support is individualized instruction that accounts for teachers’ learning needs. For example, professional learning programs often provide no opportunity for teachers to help each other or cooperate with administrators in planning activities, do not emphasize self-instruction, and do not offer differentiated training opportunities. In building such programs, teachers do not play an active role by choosing goals and activities for themselves. Another overlooked area of support is the design of professional learning. For instance, teachers do not encounter
training that is concrete and ongoing over time and that emphasizes demonstration, supervised trials, and feedback. Additionally, teachers do not have the ongoing assistance and support that should be available upon request (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989).

Guiding Research Question

The broad question for this study was “what are teachers’ perspectives of the career-stage appropriateness of their formal professional learning programs?” The intent was to discover, more specifically, teachers’ beliefs, responses, and attitudes toward professional learning programs (i.e., whether professional learning programs meet teachers’ developmental needs).

Research Design

For this qualitative study, face-to-face interviews were conducted, audiotapes were transcribed, and coding was used in data analysis. These interviews and their analysis informed the research by guiding the methodology (grounded theory) and methods (open-ended interviews, coding, and analysis) (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998; Charmaz, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Approximately twelve teachers participated in a minimum of two, one-on-one, face-to-face, audio-taped interviews with the researcher. These interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using the constant comparative method. Throughout the course of the study, each volunteer participant kept a reflection journal to record beliefs about, responses to, and attitudes toward the formal professional learning program. Participants were at varying stages of their respective teaching careers and of
both genders; however, the participating teachers were all employed by and engaged in professional learning in the same county school system.

Site and Sample Selection

The sample of the study was selected based on Bogdan and Biklen’s (1998) principle for purposeful sampling; based on this principle, participants are chosen because “they are believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory” (p. 65). Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted that the purpose of sampling is to enable the researcher to maximize information collection (perspectives) from information-rich data sources (participants in professional learning) about the study topic (career-stage appropriateness of formal professional learning programs). The researcher addressed the first session of selected formal professional learning programs. Because the researcher addressed more than one program, the potential participants had experienced different formal professional learning programs with similar formats offered through the same county school system. After introducing herself and explaining to all of the program participants the purpose of the study, the researcher accepted potential study participants currently teaching in the county school system. After reading descriptions of career stages as defined by Steffy et. al (2000), each potential participant self-identified his or her career stage. From this pool of potential participants, the researcher selected twelve who represented a balanced sampling of career stages. Because these participants were contracted teachers in the county, the novice and emeritus stages of Steffy et al.’s career stage model were not represented. Various ages and both genders were represented. In addition, they had various teaching assignments (grade levels and subject areas). Furthermore, these teachers were not employed in the researcher’s local school. Participants in this study
were chosen because they were enrolled in formal professional learning programs, represented various career stages, taught in the same county, and were able to contribute to an evolving theory. The audio-taped interviews were conducted at a location acceptable to both the interviewees and the researcher. The site was away from the professional learning area, in a quiet, distraction-free setting.

Before conducting any interviews, the researcher met with the participants to explain the purpose of the study, authorization, duration, participant responsibilities, and the general data collection methods. They were given the opportunity to agree to participate or to decline to participate, and those teachers who agreed to participate were given the opportunity to ask questions about the study and their role in it. Informed consent was obtained from all volunteers before they were interviewed.

Professional Implications of the Study

The findings of this study could guide professional learning specialists in designing, planning, and implementing professional learning programs to ensure that the professional needs of teachers at their individual career stages are addressed. An alarming percentage of new teachers leave the profession within the first three to five years. They often leave the field because they are overwhelmed by classroom management and teacher workload. Meanwhile, many of the “baby boomers” are headed for retirement. Veteran teachers often feel burned out, taken for granted, or unmotivated. Perhaps if new teachers were supported in their transition to the classroom and veteran teachers were provided with growth opportunities that encouraged them to stay in the classroom, the teaching work force could stabilize and improve the quality of teaching and learning.
The results of this study could be used to design and offer professional learning opportunities tailored to the needs of individual teachers so that they continue to grow professionally and help improve the teaching and learning in their schools. Teacher participants could also use their newly acquired knowledge of career stages and professional needs when selecting professional learning opportunities. Both of these benefits could diminish the problem of teachers’ having to endure “one-size-fits-all” learning programs of little professional or practical use to them besides fulfilling state recertification requirements and earning stipends.

Theoretical Implications of the Study

This study contributes to professional literature linking career stages and teacher developmental needs. The study also adds to the emergent understanding of personalized support systems for teachers at various stages of their careers. Additionally, this study could add to the theory of differentiated supervision for new and veteran teachers. Information from this study could contribute to theories of distributed leadership and link them to career stages and teacher developmental needs. In an era when other career professionals are entering the teaching profession, this study could also help administrators understand age-appropriate teacher developmental needs.

Overview of Dissertation Chapters

Chapter 2 of this dissertation provides a thorough review of relevant literature, chapter 3 provides a detailed description of the methodology that was used in the study, chapter 4 presents the findings of this study, and chapter 5 offers a discussion of the findings and implications for further study.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE:
TEACHER SUPERVISION AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

History of Teacher Supervision

From the very beginning of education in this country, there has always been a desire to improve instruction through supervisory practice (Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, & Poston, Jr., 2004, p. 140). According to Tanner, as early as the 1600s, teacher supervision was implemented to ensure “quality” in America’s classrooms (Downey et al., 2004, p. 127). Clergy, selectmen, or members of citizen committees were forced to make long, arduous journeys between school districts. These infrequent visits to one-room schoolhouses served as inspections. Was the building well maintained? Were the rules followed? Was the fire stoked, and was the schoolroom warm when the students arrived? Were the children able to read a section of the Bible when asked? These types of questions reflected the educational culture of the day. At this time, supervision consisted of a checklist, according to Oliva and Pawlas (1997): “The teacher who performs his labors faithfully without fault for five years will be given an increase of 25 cents a week in his pay,” providing the Board of Education approved (Downey et al., 2004, p. 127). It is interesting to note that “quality” student achievement was measured by Bible reading in this early educational climate. The emphasis was placed on teacher task performance. Tanner and Tanner (1987) argued that though the purpose of these visitations was to encourage the improvement of teaching, school supervision was so
mechanical that it was suitable only for producing mechanical teachers, not for developing teachers capable of self-directed thought and actions.

Between 1850 and 1910, the addition of principals was seen as an opportunity to improve instruction. Supervision still focused on inspection, but an expanded interest in helping teachers improve developed. By 1930, the interest had shifted from teacher improvement to school efficiency (Downey et al., 2004, p. 128). In the 1940s and 1950s, presage variables were the focal point of teacher supervision. These variables took the form of observable teacher traits such as voice, appearance, emotional stability, trustworthiness, warmth, and enthusiasm (Danielson & McGreal, 2000, p. 13). These traits became the central items in local teacher evaluation criteria. Because no standards for comparison existed, teacher evaluations were based on personal opinion. This recognition of human qualities was also seen in the emergence of human relations orientations and democratic forms of supervision (Oliva & Pawlas, 1997). During the 1960s and 1970s, there was a push to enhance basic skills acquisition and improve science and mathematics instruction; as a result, research into what teachers did or could not do to improve basic skills increased. The focus began to shift from teacher functions to teacher skills. Some researchers were developing “clinical supervision” as a way of enhancing instruction: “Clinical supervision is both a concept and a structure. . . . It is consistent with formative evaluation. It also goes beyond formative evaluation by helping the teacher to design and implement an action plan to meet instructional improvement goals” (Glickman et al., 2001, pp. 324, 328). Other researchers were designing observation instruments that allowed more accurate depictions of what was occurring in classrooms. Ultimately, they were designing studies that sought to identify
the kinds of teacher behavior that could be linked to student achievement. This behaviorist view of learning theory was the foundation of Madeline Hunter’s model of teaching, which emphasized teacher-centered, structured classrooms (Danielson & McGreal, 2000, p. 13). This time period coincided with significant advances in supervision skills and classroom observation techniques: “By 1975, supervision encompassed ideas such as scientific management, clinical supervision, collaboration, peer coaching, group dynamics, mentoring, and the teacher as artist” (p. 128). The downside of the 1970s and 1980s was that supervision resulted in evaluation dominated by checklists of behaviors and rating scales that promoted a simplistic and summative approach (p. 14). This perspective persisted into the 1990s. However, according to Brophy, the upside of this behavioral research era was that it created a knowledge base of teaching and supervision that moved the field “beyond testimonials and unsupported claims toward scientific statements based on credible data” (Danielson & McGreal, 2000, p. 14). Thankfully, supervision continued to advance, and “supervisors recognized their role as that of responding to the needs of the teachers they served . . . to help teachers improve instruction in particular areas” (Downey et al., 2004, pp. 128-129). Renihan and Renihan suggested that “the supervisory process should not be a battle between two opponents, but rather an opportunity for both supervisor and teacher to become enlightened and grow” (Dollansky, 1998, p. 11).

Current Forms of Supervision

Today, supervision takes many forms. What we have is an “amalgamation of practices and attitudes” (Downey et al., 2004, p. 129). While there are certainly holdovers from the inspection era who view supervision as a boss-employee hierarchy,
there are more cases of “collaboration between supervisors and teachers than in the past” (p. 129). Many present instructional supervisors (unlike their predecessors who snooped for deficiencies and sought dismissal) strive to help strengthen, improve, and encourage quality teachers to remain in the profession (Downey et al., 2004). Since the goal of supervision must be the improvement of instruction, according to Hoy and Forsyth, the format of supervision should not be to “control teachers, but to work cooperatively with them” (Dollansky, 1998, p.11) in order to improve their teaching ability. In fact, educators tend to think that teacher supervision should be designed for the purpose of professional development and the improvement of teaching (Danielson & McGreal, 2000, p. 9). Zepeda (2003) stated, “Supervision for novice and veteran teachers is very different, but in each of these stages, teachers need supervision that promotes growth and development” (p. 140). Beginning teachers benefit from supervision that is concrete and direct, much like that of clinical supervision. Even though all novice teachers are similar in having limited experience, they still need differentiated supervision. As Aristotle said, “Some people resemble no others and some resemble some parts of some others” (Huberman, 1995, p. 195). Experienced teachers prefer “collaborative supervision that enables them to direct their own learning” (Zepeda, 2003, p. 143). As Brundage reported, experienced teachers want the opportunity to talk about educational issues with other experienced teachers (Zepeda, 2003). Obviously, there is an inherent connection between teacher supervision and professional development.

In order for teacher supervision and professional development to result in improved instruction and student achievement, each teacher must be respectfully supervised as an individual. There is no recipe, no fail-proof set of procedures that is
appropriate for every teacher (Zepeda, 2003). Even if a cohort of novice teachers is identified, for instance, everyone in that group has a unique set of characteristics, backgrounds, and experiences. The responsible, effective supervisor considers those distinctive elements when designing growth activities. There are several forms of supervision that address the unique needs of individual teachers.

There is, of course, the easily-administered checklist approach to supervision. This method involves little more than classroom observation, after which the supervisor checks performance items that are present or missing from the observation. Occasionally, the supervisor makes some comments about what is seen in the classroom and perhaps makes suggestions for improvement. An example of this method is the Georgia Teacher Evaluation Program. This instrument divides teaching into three observable tasks: provides instruction, assesses and encourages student progress, and manages the learning environment (Georgia Department of Education, 1993, p. 73). The supervisor is encouraged to take notes on these areas during the observation and then mark NI (needs improvement) or S (satisfactory) in the designated boxes. Signatures are exchanged, and follow up, if any, is minimal. If there are too many NIs marked, then the teacher is placed on a Professional Development Plan. This process provides no opportunity for the supervisor to differentiate his or her actions based on teacher needs or for the teacher to provide formative input. The teacher is required to sign the observation form, indicating awareness of the comments but not necessarily agreement with them. This evaluation process is a series of procedures that are done to the teacher. There is no chance for the teacher to shape his or her professional learning. In this model, teachers do not facilitate their own development. Furthermore, every teacher is treated the same
way, without consideration for age, experience, or other external or internal variables. In these situations, professional learning is prescribed for a teacher by the supervisor. Because teachers must answer to the authority of the supervisor, this discursive practice “reinforces hierarchical relationships . . . constructed on clear boundaries of authority and assumptions about power within a social structure” (Downey et al., 2004, p. 160).

Another form of supervision is developmental supervision. Developmental supervision operates on the premise that there is a “clear matching of teacher developmental levels with supervisory approach” (Glickman et al., 2001, p. 153). The supervisor bases his or her initial approach on the teacher’s level of development, expertise, and commitment and the nature of the situation (p. 152). There are three phases in developmental supervision. In Phase 1, the supervisor diagnoses where the teacher is developmentally and selects the interpersonal approach that would create the best supervisory match. In Phase 2, the supervisor uses the interpersonal approach to help the teacher solve his or her own instructional problems. In Phase 3, the supervisor changes his or her approach in order to relinquish control of the problem to the teacher. Of course, Phase 3 can only occur if the teacher is ready to undertake more active decision-making. Since life and situations are more complex than any plan can anticipate, it is naïve to assume that a supervisor always knows exactly what to do. However, when using developmental supervision, conversations between the teacher and the supervisor provide information that guides the supervisor in determining the best approach. In this respect, the decision is jointly made; the supervisee is also involved (Glickman et al., 2001). The teacher and the supervisor can also discuss the teacher’s professional learning needs and jointly decide on appropriate professional learning
opportunities. A teacher with beginning teacher skills needs a different professional learning experience from a teacher possessing more developed skills. An excellent example of developmental supervision is clinical supervision. Based upon the pioneering work of Morris Cogan, who created the clinical supervisory model in 1950, this model was founded on the viewpoint of the teacher and what the teacher is thinking. As the structure of clinical supervision illustrates (pre-conference, observation, analysis and interpretation, post-conference, and critique of previous steps), in addition to classroom observations, there are also opportunities for dialogue (Glickman, et al., 2001). Participation in dialogue offers the teacher opportunities for input into his or her individual professional development.

Another type of developmental supervision is collaborative, reflective dialogue. This model of supervision combines instructional supervision, ongoing professional development, coaching and mentoring, and adult learning: “The success of this model is dependent upon the frequent presence of the building principal in classrooms” (Downey et al., 2004, p. 130). It embodies the basic premise of John Dewey’s work: “He emphasized that teacher learning and growth do not magically and spontaneously unfold. Rather, teachers depend on appropriate interaction between themselves and the principal and between themselves and other professionals” (p. 132). A prime example of collaborative, reflective dialogue is the Downey Walk-Through, which reflects the thinking of both Dewey and Cogan and “such disciplines as psychology, philosophy, and sociology, as well as education” (p. 132). It is centered on the teacher, not the principal or any other supervisor, and also incorporates the ideas of differentiated supervision.
Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall (1998) offered the following definition of differentiated supervision:

An in-class and in-school process for refining and expanding instructional repertoire that accounts for and differentiates between support and challenge according to the teachers’ individual learning and developmental needs. Such a process promotes both individual and school-wide change, learning, and growth. (p. 54)

According to Downey et al. (2004), “differentiated supervision is formative in nature; that is, it extends over a period of time and requires a trustful relationship between the teacher and the principal. Trustful relationships with staff are a precursor to differentiated supervision” (p. 132). These relationships often share qualities of mentor/mentee relationships. They take time to build, they are reciprocal, and they are confidential. They are supported by honest conversations, shared problems, brainstormed solutions, and genuine advice: “We also know that when a principal is actively involved in formative, differentiated supervision, teachers are more willing to accept summative accounts as true representations of their abilities” (p. 133). This acceptance facilitates frank discussions about alternatives for professional learning. The supervisor and the teacher can establish a partnership for the purpose of improving the quality of teaching through participating in professional learning activities that both parties consider valuable for the teacher. In the case of differentiated supervision, the teacher chooses professional learning classes based on self-identified professional needs as determined by dialogue between the teacher and the supervisor.
Glatthorn (1997) defined differentiated supervision as “an approach to supervision that provides teachers with options about the kinds of supervisory and evaluative services they receive” (p. 3). Since these options are discussed between the teacher and the supervisor, differentiated supervision can unfold only in an environment in which collegial relationships are built through “cooperation and mutual assistance” (p. 177). This assistance is given through a “process approach . . . one responsive to special needs” (p. 170). According to Glatthorn, teachers need to be involved in “two or more” of the following:

1. Intensive development (i.e., mandatory use of the clinical supervision model),
2. Cooperative development (i.e., developmental, socially mediated activities such as peer coaching or action research), or
3. Self-directed development (i.e., developmental activities teachers direct on their own). (p. 170)

The basis of the intensive development option is clinical supervision, which consists of a pre-observation conference, extended classroom observation, and a post-observation conference (Zepeda, 2003, p. 44).

Models of Professional Learning

Just as there are different types of supervision, there are different delivery models of professional learning. Not all teachers learn best in the same way. Choosing a preferred delivery model of professional learning is another way a teacher can meet his or her developmental needs. The most common delivery model of professional learning is in-service training: “In-service education of teachers has a long history, but present practices have not been well received by teachers” (Dollansky, 1998, p. 8). The problem
is that professional learning has not made the adjustments necessary to prepare
contemporary educators better to meet the complexity and demands of the current
educational climate. Many teachers consider professional learning too formal, another
teacher duty, and the result of administrative rather than teacher planning. Professional
learning is something done to them. When most educators hear the words “professional
learning,” they associate them narrowly with workshops and in-service (Reitzug, 2002).
The history of professional learning reveals a predominance of short-term workshops
(Ganser, 2000, p. 3). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, 1999,
the time actually spent in those activities is less than eight hours—the equivalent of less
than one day of training—per activity: “The complexity of teaching and learning is
incompatible with the narrow focus of much traditional staff development” (Reitzug,
2002, p. 1). Unfortunately, too often a divide exists between what teachers need as
professional learning and what they get: “Teachers have unique needs across the career
continuum” (Zepeda, 2003, p. 26). Learning opportunities must take into account the
varying needs of adults. Otherwise, according to Schaefer, “teachers will stagnate to the
point that they become ‘educational sales clerks’ and teaching becomes a ‘humdrum
job’” (Zepeda, 2003, p. 119). Karant argued that in order for professional learning to
address teacher needs, teachers must become empowered to make professional decisions
about their own development (Dollansky, 1998). As a result, another, more personal and
effective delivery model is evolving. The context of supervision is shifting from
oversight and evaluation to collaboration and reflection (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-
Gordon, 1995). The evolution of the purposes and forms of teacher supervision to suit
today’s culture has necessitated an accompanying development of professional learning:
“Many of today’s successful schools are fast becoming centers of shared inquiry and decision making . . . . [teachers] are collaborating with each other and with supervisors” (Blase & Blase, 1998, p. 3). As a result, teachers are choosing paths for professional learning that meet their individual needs.

Although many scholars have studied professional learning, there is no one model of professional learning that has been widely accepted. However, the field of professional learning is evolving gradually from a patchwork of courses and workshops into a system ensuring that education professionals regularly enhance their academic knowledge, professional performance, and image as professionals. (Joyce & Showers, 1995, pp. 8-9)

Forms of Professional Learning

Guskey suggested that there are many “processes and activities” recognized as forms of professional learning that might “enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators” (Reitzug, 2002, p. 2). Training is the traditional and still dominant form and includes workshops, presentations, and other types of in-service activities: “Training typically includes a direct instruction/lecture component, skill demonstration, and modeling, and may also include simulated skill practice, and even workplace coaching and consultation” (Reitzug, 2002, p. 3). A second form of professional learning consists of those learning opportunities that are “embedded” in the work setting. They include processes such as inquiry, discussion, evaluation, consultation, collaboration, and problem solving. It may be stimulated by new roles for teachers (e.g., teacher leader, peer coach, teacher researcher), new structures (e.g., problem-solving groups, decision-making teams, common planning periods, self-
A recently emerging, third form of professional learning is the network. Reitzug (2002) defined networks as collections of educators from across different schools who interact regularly to discuss and share practices around a particular focus or philosophy of schooling (e.g., new math standards; authentic instruction). . . . They interact via such means as in-person sharing meetings, cross-school or cross-classroom visitations, professional institutes, critical friends groups, and electronic forms of communication. (p. 3)

Leiberman and Groinick found networks to have a number of positive effects on the professional learning of teachers (Reitzug, 2002). Another fairly recent form of professional learning is the Professional Development School (PDS), in which university faculty, PDS teachers, and student teachers work collaboratively to enhance the student teaching experience and to improve the professional development of the PDS teachers and staff. These goals are met through active involvement of the university faculty in the school, formal professional development experiences, and through school-based collaborative research. (Reitzug, 2002, p. 3)

The philosophy, goal, and improvement of American public education continue to evolve (see Table 2.1). In the 1600s, teaching was merely a job consisting of perfunctory tasks. Quality teachers completed all tasks. Teachers needed a minimum of education
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Method of Supervision</th>
<th>Measurement of Quality Teaching</th>
<th>Teacher Growth</th>
<th>Focus of School Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1620-1850</td>
<td>Outside observer</td>
<td>Checklist of duties / inspection of facility</td>
<td>Performance of all observed teacher duties</td>
<td>Teacher behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850-1910</td>
<td>Observation by building/area principal</td>
<td>Checklist of duties / evaluation of teaching</td>
<td>Performance of all duties/teacher development</td>
<td>Teacher behaviors/teacher improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910-1930s</td>
<td>Evaluation of school efficiency by area supervisor</td>
<td>Smooth school operations</td>
<td>Strategies for managing increased number of students</td>
<td>Shift from teacher improvement to school efficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940-1950s</td>
<td>Observation by principal of “teacher traits”</td>
<td>Evaluation of teacher voice, appearance, warmth, enthusiasm, etc.</td>
<td>Developing areas of human relations</td>
<td>Shift from school efficiency to teacher traits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960s-1970s</td>
<td>Clinical supervision</td>
<td>Teacher-centered, structured classrooms and classroom observations</td>
<td>Researching what teachers could/could not do to improve acquisition of basic skills</td>
<td>Shift from teacher traits to teacher behaviors and their link to student achievement (emergence of formal staff development)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-1990s</td>
<td>Clinical supervision, scientific management, coaching, mentoring</td>
<td>Observation of classrooms, checklists of behaviors, rating scales</td>
<td>Identification of teacher needs, areas of improvement</td>
<td>Data connecting teacher behavior to student achievement – Late 90s, link between teacher needs, staff development, and student achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-</td>
<td>More collaboration between supervisors and teachers</td>
<td>Analysis of student test scores, implementation of differentiated instruction</td>
<td>Teachers learning and practicing strategies for continuous improvement</td>
<td>Shift from traditional staff development to differentiated programs of professional learning to enhance student achievement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and provided minimal reading and calculating skills. By 1910, teaching still consisted of task performance, but principals also began to recognize that some teachers were more competent than others. Through visitation and observation, principals began to help struggling teachers improve. By the 1930s, schools were attracting more students, so efficiency of school operations became the measure of a quality school. Teaching, itself, took a back seat in school improvement. In the 1940s and 1950s, the focus of quality education shifted to identifying the human traits of a teacher such as voice and appearance. Not until the 1960s was teacher performance related to what actually happened (instructionally) in the classroom. Methods of teaching were described and taught to new and veteran teachers. Formalized classes were designed. School improvement was sought by instructing teachers how to teach. Supervisors believed that if teachers were taught what school officials prescribed as a “better way,” teachers would adopt these new practices and students would be successful at acquiring the basic skills. Finally, in the mid 1970s, school improvement focused on identification of individual teacher needs. Data were collected that linked teacher behavior to student achievement. There was a decline in formalized classes “doing” to teachers. Coaching and mentoring emerged as non-traditional forms of professional learning. Instead of making teachers participate in formal developmental classes, the emphasis shifted to collaborative and constructivist learning models. Staff development designed for those lacking in teaching skills was replaced with professional learning opportunities, designed for all teachers to be able to grow, explore, and develop as teaching professionals. While there are still occasions of traditional classes, today teachers are not seen as independent practitioners; rather, they are seen as groups of professionals learning together during their workday.
In addition, the focus of professional learning encompasses both teacher competency and student achievement. The purpose of professional learning is not only to improve teaching but also to increase student achievement. Teachers analyze student work, reinforce student strengths, and work together to solve the problem of student weaknesses. In fact, the success of professional learning and the measure of school improvement are determined by increased student achievement.

Theories of Teacher Career Cycles

The availability of different forms of professional learning provides teachers with the freedom to choose activities that meet their individual needs. More than one prominent force guides teachers when choosing professional learning activities. One of these forces is where the teacher is on his or her career cycle. This cycle explains that a teacher’s progression through his or her career is filled with “plateaus, discontinuities, regressions, spurts, and dead ends” (Huberman, 1995, p. 196). Downey et al. (2004) argued “that professional development that is effective for beginning teachers is far different from that which is effective for teachers at other points in their careers” (p. 175). One highly respected teacher growth model is detailed in the book *The Life Cycle of the Career Teacher* (Steffy et al., 2000). This model is based on the idea that teachers will continue to grow and develop throughout their professional lifetime, provided they are in an appropriate learning environment. The model presents and details an ongoing progression that takes place throughout a teaching career:

- the model views personal professional growth as unfolding through interactions between individuals and their environments in an identifiable, sequential pattern;
- acknowledges that individuals move along the continuum at different rates; and
views the growing individual as an active participant in his or her own development (Downey et al., 2004, p. 177).

This “unfolding” is represented as passing through phases similar to those discussed by Erikson (1963), Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, and McKee (1978), and others. Their idea was that teachers move through phases at individual rates from content and activities that seem to flow from one to another along a continuum. There are different concerns at different moments in the professional life cycle. A second-year teacher has different preoccupations than one who has been teaching for 30 years (Huberman, 1995, p. 206). The life-cycle model consists of six phases: the novice phase, the apprentice phase, the professional phase, the expert phase, the distinguished phase, and the emeritus phase. Each of these phases is “content and task specific” and presents “a vision of good practice based on transferring knowledge and contextual experience to another phase” (Downey et al., 2004, p. 177). The beauty of this model is that it emphasizes the individual teacher’s process of growth. McLaughlin and Yee (1988) described opportunity and capacity as the elements of a “challenging career.” They defined opportunity as the chance to develop one’s basic competence. This opportunity is based on the availability of stimulation, challenge, feedback, and support. Capacity is the availability of tools to do one’s job and the capability to influence the direction of one’s institution (Guskey & Huberman, 1995). Huberman’s open model of a teacher’s career life cycle consists of four phases. In the first phase, the novice teacher discusses, debates, and experiments with experienced peers. The stabilized teacher extends his or her repertoire. This teacher is also better able to “consolidate the passage from subject matter mastery to its didactic transposition in class” (Huberman, 1995, p. 218). The
diversification phase comes next and is characterized by teachers who stretch themselves collaboratively. The final phase, the stock-takers, is distinguished by those teachers who may find it profitable to revive some “overused pedagogical routines” (p. 218).

Later, Gregorc (1973) recognized four stages. The becoming stage found teachers ambivalent in their commitment to teaching. Throughout this stage, teachers develop their initial concepts about the purposes of education, the nature of teaching, the role of expectations in the educational process, and the role of the school as a social organization. The next stage, the growing stage, finds the teachers establishing their commitment based on their minimal expectations of the school and those that the school has of the individual. Also during this time, teachers form their basic concepts and stereotypes of the education process and their personal discipline and responsibilities. The third stage, the maturing stage, finds teachers having a strong commitment to education. They function beyond minimum expectations and often draw upon and contribute to school resources. Most notably, these teachers “test concepts about education, self, others, subject matter, and the environment” (Fessler, 1995, p. 173). At the “fully functioning stage,” teachers possess a definite commitment to education. They find themselves immersed in the process of education. In doing so, they try to realize their full potential. As a result, concepts and beliefs are constantly undergoing testing and restructuring (p. 173).

In 1972, Katz articulated four developmental stages of preschool teachers. In addition, Katz identified the professional learning needed at each stage. The “survival stage” consists of the first two years, during which teachers need technical, on-site support. The “consolidation” years proceed from year two to year three, during which
there is still a need for on-site assistance. In addition, they need access to specialists and the advice of colleagues and consultants. “Renewal” takes a teacher through the fourth year. At this time, teachers are interested in strategies for improvement. They attend conferences and join professional organizations. They seek access to demonstration projects, teacher centers, and professional journals. At five or more years of experience, teachers attend seminars and institutes. They take courses and enter degree programs. They also make time to read books and journals (Fessler, 1995, p. 174). These early attempts at defining teacher stages of development see only as far as mature teachers, after which there is no further explication of professional growth.

Research on Teacher Career Stages

Formal discussion of teacher career stages is traced back to the work of Frances Fuller in 1969. She proposed a concept of teacher development called the Stages of Concern Model. There were three initial stages of concern:

1. Preteaching phase – no concerns
2. Early teaching – concerns of self
3. Late phase – concerns about pupils

As these stages demonstrate, the concerns evolve from an unawareness of concerns to an egocentric focus of concerns to a student-centered focus of concerns. After additional research, Fuller and Brown (1975) added a fourth stage of concern that addressed teacher concerns about the learning, social, and emotional needs of the students and the teacher’s ability to meet the needs of the students. This fourth stage extends the teacher’s concerns to needs of the whole child, beyond the academic dimension.
Empirical data about teacher needs and concerns at different stages of their careers emerged in 1980, when Kevin Ryan conducted structured interviews that created a research driven database. Newman, Burden, and Applegate, conducted a similar study in the early 1980s. The only shortcoming of these initial studies was that only a small number of people from limited geographic areas were interviewed (Fessler, 1995, p. 174).

Burden (1982) further advanced the study of teacher career stages by pulling together the work of others into the present framework and refining the labels and characteristics of teacher careers. He identified three stages: the survival stage of the first year, the adjustment stage from years two through four, and the mature stage beginning at five years. Although Burden made significant contributions to the topic, he still neglected to differentiate teacher growth beyond this last stage (Fessler, 1995, p. 175).

In 1980, Feiman and Floden identified three approaches to teacher development by reviewing research findings. They first described stages of career development: survival, consolidation, renewal, and maturity. Then they described approaches to career development related to personal development: ego, moral, and cognitive development. They synthesized their work by identifying programs of professional inservice to support teacher development (Fessler, 1995, p. 175). According to Fessler, “Teachers experience many shifts in stages throughout their careers, often meandering back and forth between periods of growth and frustration in response to factors in their personal and organizational lives” (p. 172).

The basic premise of the Teacher Career Cycle Model (Burke et al., 1984) is that a teacher’s individual career cycle is influenced by external environmental factors, the teacher’s personal environment, and other individuals within the teacher’s organizational
environment. This model of development is not linear; rather, “environmental influences create a dynamic ebb and flow” (Fessler, 1995, p. 175). Teachers respond by moving up, down, and through various stages. Furthermore, this model was the first to differentiate among “mature” teachers. According to this prototype, teachers start at the pre-service stage and move through induction, competency building, enthusiasm and growth, and career frustration. As mature teachers, they continue to develop through career stability and on to career wind-down and career exit. In more recent models, such as that of Michael Huberman (1995), there is even more differentiation, and alternative career options experienced by teachers at various stages are accounted for. For example, one multi-faceted view of the teacher career cycle includes the following stages: the pre-professional stage, the threshold phase, growing into the profession, the first professional phase, reorientation to oneself and the profession, the second professional phase, and running down (Fessler, 1995, p. 176).

Enhancement of Professional Learning

Although the phase and stage theories of teacher development are interesting, they are of little value to teachers or the field of education unless they are put to practical use. How can this knowledge improve the quality of teachers, enhance quality teaching, and improve student achievement? Fessler, (1995) argued that “there is a need to identify personalized support systems for teachers at various stages of their careers” (p. 188). This identification can be accomplished by individualizing professional learning to support teacher growth. The literature on adult learning indicates the need to individualize teacher learning. Sternberg’s work indicates that novice teachers need different learning experiences from experienced teachers (Glickman et al., 2001, p. 62).
At the earlier stages of teacher growth, traditional forms of professional learning and inservice can be useful because they focus on improving teacher skills. The models also broaden the definition of professional learning to address personal needs and problems of teachers.

Another area to consider when planning effective professional learning opportunities is adult development. There are stages that all adults pass through, whether they are career teachers or not. The professional learning needs of all teachers cannot be met if those planning professional learning ignore adult developmental stages when choosing activities and delivery models. Cross (1981) identified the developmental needs of adults in separate stages from ages 18 to 63 (see Table 2.2). This information has direct implications for career teachers in particular. According to Boucouvalas & Krupp (1983), “those 40 and older have their time and priorities well planned; they do not want to waste time in meetings; they are not highly receptive to new ideas or innovations; and they seek satisfaction from professional achievements” (p. 185). Teachers in this age bracket are good, dedicated teachers who seek to do what is best for their students. Therefore, new programs or practices must have both personal and professional appeal before these teachers will be willing to commit the time and effort required to change their behavior (Guskey & Huberman, 1995).

Given the diversity of the teaching force and the varied ages and experience levels of any given faculty, professional learning specialists need to be aware of the principles of adult learning. Traditional professional learning programs neither take into consideration how adults learn best nor build activities around adult learning theory. Levinson and Sheehy asserted that adult learners are more self-disciplined and less
Table 2.2

Developmental Needs of Adults in Separate Stages from Ages 18-63

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Characteristic interests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-22</td>
<td>Adventure and autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-28</td>
<td>New friendships, increased maturity, contemplation of marriage, exploration of different careers, contemplation of career goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-34</td>
<td>Job stability, mentor/mentee relationships, marriage, separation, divorce, long-range security, success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39-42</td>
<td>Promotion, mortality, reduction of dependence with boss and spouse, reassessment of personal values and priorities, concern with limited time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43-55</td>
<td>Career peak, service as mentor, high community involvement, emergence of new hobbies and interests, beginning of self-satisfaction and lifestyle enjoyment, greatest job productivity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Cross, 1981, p. 168)

Adult learners enjoy shaping their own learning experiences and find risk taking challenging. Adults are more self-motivated when they deem the learning to be either personally or professionally important and when they can see an immediate and direct application of learned material to their classroom. When these criteria are met, learning becomes fun and satisfying (Weller & Weller, 2002, p. 173).

Theory of Adult Learning

Whether implementing traditional delivery methods or newer, collaborative methods, effective professional learning is based on the theory of andragogy, adult learning. Malcolm Knowles (1980) proposed four basic assumptions of adult learning:

1. Adults have a psychological need to be self-directing.

2. Adults bring an expansive reservoir of experience that can and should be tapped in the learning situation.
3. Adults’ readiness to learn is influenced by a need to solve real-life problems often related to adult developmental tasks.

4. Adults are performance centered in their orientation to learning, wanting to make immediate application of knowledge (Glickman et al., 2001, p. 63).

Later, Knowles (1984) added a fifth assumption – that adult learning is primarily intrinsically motivated. Although initially greeted with blanket acceptance, questions have been raised about whether these assumptions only apply to adults (Tennant, 1986). For instance, are not children, like adults, also performance oriented? Both groups of learners want to use immediately what they learn. In “When Teachers Become Learners,” Svinicki (1996) stated, “faculty members’ learning about teaching is just as subject to the principles of learning as is their students’ learning about content” (p. 1). Teachers must feel that the content is relevant, or they will be unenthusiastic: “I try to recommit myself to treating my learners (the faculty) as learners and recognize that much of what I tell them to do with regard to their students also applies to them as well” (p. 1). In fact, “Knowles himself, before his death in 1997, came to acknowledge that differences between adults and children as learners may be a matter of degree and situation rather than a rigid dichotomy” (Glickman et al., 2001, p. 63). Nevertheless, effective professional learning incorporates the best principles of andragogy. In 1996, both the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future and the National Foundation for Improving Education recommended learning opportunities for adults that promote activities reflecting the influence of Knowles’s work (Zepeda, 2003).

Malcolm Knowles is not the only one who has investigated the needs of the adult learner. One principle of adult learning is to make learning authentic for the adult. In
1986, Langer and Applebee’s research in the area of reading and writing instruction offered “a construct for making learning authentic for adults” (Zepeda, 2003, p. 135). Authentic learning “embraces ownership, appropriateness, structure, collaboration, internalization, reflection, and motivation” (p. 135). Another principle is to know what motivates the adult learner: “Adult learning is not static; what motivated an adult in previous years might not do so now. Prior learning experiences affect adults and their current beliefs, self-confidence, levels of self-esteem, and overall drive to succeed at learning” (p. 136). It is also important to offer professional learning that challenges the status quo by empowering teachers to “make critical judgments; ask critical questions of their practice; and revise methods based on active inquiry over time” (p. 137). Yet another principle of adult learning is to empower transformational learning, which, according to Mezirow, “helps learners learn what they want to learn and at the same time acquire more developmentally advanced meaning perspective” (p. 199). Teachers who are empowered by transformational learning “make critical judgments, ask critical questions of their practice, and revise methods based on active inquiry over time” (p. 137). The principles of constructivism are another source of principles for adult learning. Adult learners “construct meaning from what they experience; thus learning is an active meaning-making process” (Glatthorn, 1990, p. 6). Furthermore, “as active learners, teachers need to construct their own meanings based on what they do and experience” (Zepeda, 2003, p. 102). According to Brinner, “Learning progresses from the external to the internal and from the social (interpersonal) to the individual (intrapersonal)” (p. 138). It is also important to establish a climate conducive for adult learning. McCall stated, “Underlying all others is a basic assumption that adult learning is best achieved in
dialogue” (p. 137). Wheatly argued that “individuals generate information in their interactions with each other; information then becomes a feedback spiral enriching and creating additional information” (p. 137). Included in a successful adult learning environment is mutual trust and respect between teachers and their supervisors: “Adult learners are more motivated to take risks if they feel support from their supervisors and colleagues, and they are more likely to try new skills if there is no threat of retribution should they falter” (p. 137). This climate does not materialize by chance. Rather, supervisors need to “take active and concrete steps to foster the rich spiral of adult interaction and professional growth” (p. 138).

Summary

So how does the effective supervisor foster this spiral? The supervisor must recognize that there are links between supervision, teacher career stages, teacher career phases, adult development, andragogy, and professional learning. The supervisor must work diligently to create relationships with his or her staff that are founded on trust, respect, and communication. To do so, the supervisor must frequently visit teachers’ classrooms. After these observations (formal and informal), the effective supervisor engages the teachers in professional, collegial dialogue. The supervisor asks questions that encourage purposeful teacher reflection about individual practices, strengths, and weaknesses. This reflection creates opportunities for the teachers to expand knowledge and skills. This type of supervisor creates a collegial environment where risk-taking is encouraged. In these situations, teachers, who are aware of their needs, are also empowered to self-prescribe their own professional learning.
The past 75 years of educational research have answered numerous questions about instructional supervision, adult development, adult learning, career teacher life cycle, teacher phases, teacher stages, and their connection with professional learning. The ultimate purpose of all of the studies, surveys, and interviews has been to enhance teacher quality. However, as with any topic, more knowledge seems to invite more questioning. For instance, what developmental stages do supervisors experience? To what degree does a supervisor whose professional growth is stagnant stunt the professional growth of teachers he or she supervises? How do teachers in a stifling teaching environment continue to develop professionally? How does the supervisor facilitate professional growth if a teacher’s adult developmental stage and teacher career stage are not congruent? Additionally, it would be interesting to learn which stage has the most influence on teachers: their adult developmental stage or their teacher career stage. Is a young teacher (early to mid twenties) going to have enough self-confidence to take risks in the classroom? Hence, questions arise regarding teachers’ perspectives of career-stage appropriate professional learning. In the same vein, further research could focus on teachers’ perspectives of supervision at different stages of their careers. Most of the research to date has focused on the effects a supervisor has on teachers. What about the reverse perspective? How does a successfully developing teacher influence a traditional supervisor? Any of these questions could be the basis of further research.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter on the methodology of the study includes seven sections. The first section presents the background and framework of symbolic interactionism, the theoretical perspective that guided the study as well as the interpretation of the findings. The second section states the purpose of the research and the questions that were explored. The third section describes the site and sample selection process. The fourth section discusses the data collection procedures, specifically interviews and documents. The fifth section presents an in-depth view of grounded theory methodology and constant comparative analysis. The sixth section discusses techniques used for data management. The seventh is a subjectivity statement.

Theoretical Framework: Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism, a primary approach to qualitative research among sociologists, was described by Blumer (1969) as an empirical social science perspective that “sees meaning as arising in the process of interaction between people” (p. 4) and “sees meanings as social products, as creations that are formed in and through defining activities of people as they interact” (p. 5). He also described it as “activity in which humans interpret each other’s gestures and act on the basis of meaning yielded by interpretation” (pp. 55-56). From the point of view of symbolic interactionism, even though others influence the individual, he or she also maintains distance from others and
is able to initiate individual action (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). Symbolic interactionists describe this process in order to understand behavior (Jacob, 1987).

**Background of Symbolic Interactionism**

The basic method that preceded symbolic interactionism originated with Cooley in 1909 (Schwandt, 2001). He believed that sympathetic introspection helped researchers understand the meanings and interpretations of people’s reactions in any given setting by observing and interviewing them. In 1934, George Herbert Mead set the stage for symbolic interactionism, specifically in his philosophy of pragmatism (shared by Charles H. Cooley, John Dewey, W. I. Thomas, and William James) and his belief that humans should be studied through their thoughts and actions. Mead (1934) identified two forms of interaction in human society: “the conversation of gestures” and “the use of significant symbols” (p. 62). These terms led to Blumer’s (1969) creation of the term “symbolic interactionism,” which labels his “relatively distinctive approach to the study of human group life and human conduct” (p. 1).

**Framework of Symbolic Interactionism**

The Blumer-Mead version of symbolic interactionism rests on the following three premises: (a) that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them; (b) that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows; and (c) that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). The result of this interpretative process can be referred to as a perspective.
Various meanings of *perspective* exist. For the purpose of this study, Becker and Greer’s 1960 definition of *perspective* is used:

a coordinated set of ideas and actions a person uses in dealing with some problematic situation; a person’s ordinary way of thinking and feeling about and acting in such a situation. These thoughts and actions are coordinated in the sense that the actions flow reasonably from the actor’s perspective from the ideas contained in the perspective. Similarly, the ideas can be seen by an observer to be one of the possible sets of ideas which might form the underlying rationale for the person’s actions and are seen by the actor as providing a justification for acting as he does. (p. 34)

This definition aligns with Blumer’s version of symbolic interactionism. Blumer (1969) asserted that human beings act based on the meaning that things have for them. In other words, human beings act on the basis of what they observe, interpret, and assess. Simply stated, actions are determined by the meaning of the thing to the person, rather than stemming from environmental stimuli. Symbolic interactionism asserts that human beings act not because of outside stimuli but because of social interactions experienced with regard to that thing.

Blumer’s second premise is what differentiates symbolic interactionism from other approaches: “The meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing” (p. 4). For symbolic interactionists, things do not have meanings simply because they exist; rather, human interactions render them meaningful. In addition, for symbolic interactionists, meanings
of objects continuously emerge. They are “social products, . . . creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact” (p. 5).

If one declares that given kinds of behavior are the result of particular factors, there is no need to concern oneself with the meaning of the thing toward which human beings act; one then merely identifies the initiating factors and the resulting behavior (p. 3). The third premise accentuates the formative nature of symbolic interactionism. People direct, check, modify, and transform their actions in response to what they encounter in the actions of others. This process at its core is flexible, requiring researchers to vary themes of questioning, adopt new cores of observation as the study progresses, and change their beliefs about the pertinent data as more information is collected and understood (Denzin, 1970). According to Blumer (1969), “Meanings are used and revised as instruments for the guidance and formation of action” (p. 5).

**Relationship of Symbolic Interactionism to the Study**

Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical perspective well suited to this study because it emphasizes the meanings people construct in their social settings. This study explored the effectiveness, utility, and career-stage appropriateness of professional learning as perceived by the study’s participants. Each participating teacher’s unique career stage shaped his or her relationship to the content, the presenter, and the delivery model of the professional learning program. This study researched teachers’ perspectives of the career-stage appropriateness of professional learning programs in which they participated. Finally, symbolic interactionism fit this study because it acknowledged that other people influence individuals but that they are capable of maintaining enough
distance from others to initiate individual action (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). Bogdan
and Biklen (1998) confirmed this point:

People in a given situation (for example, students in a particular class) often
develop common definitions (or “shared perspectives” in the symbolic
interactionist language) since they regularly interact and share experiences,
problems, and backgrounds, but consensus is not inevitable. While some take
“shared definitions” to indicate “truth,” meaning is always subject to negotiation.
People who see things differently can influence meaning. (pp. 25-26)

As a result of participating in system-wide professional learning, teachers interacted and
shared experiences. This study discovered both the shared and the unique perspectives of
individual participants of the career-stage appropriateness of professional learning in one
county school system.

Statement of Research Purpose and Questions

Over the course of the study, approximately twenty-four hours of participant
interviews were conducted and recorded. The researcher interpreted the different
perspectives of the participants in the study by scrutinizing close to four hundred pages of
interview transcripts. Participant journals and demographics were analyzed as well. The
researcher also generated and reviewed field notes. Throughout the data analysis, the
researcher created various graphic organizers to help compare and contrast the
information. In addition, the following general research questions were investigated:

1. What are teachers’ perspectives of the career-stage appropriateness of their
   formal professional learning programs?
2. Do formal professional learning programs meet teachers’ developmental needs?

Site and Sample Selection

The sample of the study was selected based on Bogdan and Biklen’s (1998) principle for purposeful sampling. Based on this principle, participants are chosen because “they are believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory” (p. 65). This principle held true for the sample selected for this study. The sample consisted of practicing teachers who participated in professional learning in the same county school system. Accordingly, their interpretations of their individual learning experiences as revealed through their interviews helped expand the developing theory. Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted that the purpose of sampling is to maximize information collection from information-rich data sources about the study topic. For this study, the researcher’s process confirmed this assertion. The interviews gathered from the purposeful sample exposed information-rich perspectives about career-stage appropriate content, presenter, and delivery model of formal professional learning programs. The researcher addressed the first session of selected formal professional learning programs available to all practicing teachers in the same county school system. Although the researcher started the sampling in November of 2005, she soon discovered that most of the participants were not practicing teachers. They were stay-at-home moms acquiring initial state certification or maintaining their certificates. In fact, some of the participants had never taught in this county school system. Therefore, they were not qualified to participate in the study. In order to find qualified study participants, the researcher was forced to interrupt sampling until the summer of 2006. During the summer, participation in county professional
learning programs was restricted to practicing county teachers. All in all, the researcher addressed six different programs. Hence, the study participants had experienced different formal professional learning programs with similar formats offered through the same county school system. At the opening session of each program, the researcher introduced herself and explained to all of the professional learning participants the purpose of the study. After a brief explanation of career-stage theory, the researcher shared descriptions of teacher career stages as described by Steffy et al. (2000). Then each potential participant read descriptions of the teacher career stages and self-selected his or her career stage. The researcher then recruited potential study participants from each program, all of whom were the teachers currently under contract in the county school system. From this initial sample of potential participants, the researcher selected twelve who represented a sampling of career stages. However, since these participants were contracted teachers in the county, the novice and emeritus stages of Steffy’s career stage model were not represented. Various ages and both genders were represented. In addition, they had various teaching assignments (grade levels and subject areas) and levels of education. Furthermore, these teachers were not employed in the researcher’s local school. Participants for the study were chosen because they were in formal professional learning programs, represented varying career stages, taught in the same county, and were able to contribute to an evolving theory. Audio-taped interviews were gathered in duplicate at locations acceptable to both the interviewees and the researcher. The locations varied from empty classrooms and conference rooms to coffee shops and restaurants after the morning rush. The sites were always away from the professional learning location, in as quiet and distraction-free setting as possible.
Before conducting any interviews, the researcher reviewed with qualified study candidates the purpose of the study, authorization, duration, participant responsibilities, and the general methods of data collection. Each candidate was given another opportunity to agree to participate or to decline to participate in the study. Those teachers who agreed to participate were given the opportunity to ask any clarifying questions. Informed consent (Appendix A) was obtained from all participants in the study before they were interviewed. Demographic and professional information about the participants were also gathered and reported (Appendix B). Teachers were presented with the consent form and assured of confidentiality throughout the study. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym that was used throughout the reporting. Interviews were conducted from November 2005 through July 2006 during and after the participants’ professional learning programs. The researcher conducted facilitated interviews. However, the interviewee’s responses to certain questions helped determine subsequent questions. Prior to follow-up interviews, the researcher re-read the transcripts from the initial interviews, listened to them again, and made notes regarding matters that required clarification, elaboration, or illustration. Furthermore, she structured questions to fill out categories and to obtain participants’ responses to emerging themes and findings. Participants were also allowed to share any new or additional insights into their perspective of career-stage appropriate professional learning. Table 3.1 presents the demographic data for the participants in this study.
Table 3.1

Demographic Data for All Participants in Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/Gender/Age</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Years at Current School</th>
<th>Current Grade Level</th>
<th>Subject Area</th>
<th>Career Stage</th>
<th>Degree Earned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheila Miller/F/37</td>
<td>&lt; 1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Apprentice</td>
<td>B.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa Papa/F/28</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>Theatre Arts</td>
<td>Apprentice</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonard Joseph/M/47</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>Theatre Arts</td>
<td>Apprentice</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becky Pringle/F/28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Lang. Arts</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>M.Ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fran Robins/F/30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>M.Ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Clements/M/45</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janet Hand/F/32</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>M.Ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peggy Smeal/F/47</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>M.Ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leahanne Merritt/F/55</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3,5</td>
<td>Gifted</td>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>M.Ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Angelo/M/39</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>Theatre</td>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>M.Ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie Burt/F/52</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>Theatre Arts</td>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>Ed. S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth Wagner/F/37</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>Gifted</td>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>M.Ed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

Interviews

Because of the type of data required for this study, specifically the perspectives of the professional learning participants, interviews were the primary source of data: “The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind” (Patton, 1990, p. 278). Taylor and Bogdan (1998) described in-depth interviews as “repeated face-to-face encounters between the researcher and informants directed toward understanding informants’ perspectives of their lives, experiences, or situations as expressed in their own words” (p. 88). Kvale (1996) asserted that “interviews are particularly suited for studying people’s understanding of the meanings in their lived world, describing their
experiences and self-understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world” (p. 105). Therefore, interviews were appropriate to the subject matter and purpose of this study. As a secondary source of data, a researcher journal consisting of researcher reflections, field notes, and memos was maintained. In addition, the participants kept a journal focusing on their perceptions of their professional learning experience, paying particular attention to its career-stage appropriateness.

For this qualitative study, face-to-face interviews were conducted, audiotapes were transcribed, and coding was used in data analysis. At the beginning of each initial face-to-face interview, the participant was asked to describe what he or she required from professional learning in order to meet his or her professional learning needs. To aid in listening to and reflecting upon the participant’s response, the researcher jotted field notes in the forms of key words, phrases, and topics. The researcher facilitated this interview by posing follow-up questions related to the study participant’s initial response and the interviewer’s notes. The responses to follow-up questions gleaned descriptions rich in detail, including participant anecdotes and personal experiences. After each interview, the researcher listened to the audiotape and compared it to the jotted notes. In a timely manner, the researcher transcribed the audiotapes. During the first phase of note-taking and coding, the data triggered questions in the researcher’s mind. As a result the researcher recognized that occasionally, similar words, phrases, and descriptions did not have similar meanings. Examples include *hands on, new, relevant, materials,* and *resources.* To ascertain specific meanings, a second interview was then conducted. The purpose of the second interview was to clarify ideas and issues that emerged from the
initial interview. Progressive interview questioning is consistent with grounded theory methodology and constant comparative analysis.

Documents

Personal and official documents were also used as sources of data. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) indicated that personal documents might include personal memos and calendars. During this study, the researcher used these memos when generating interview guides specific to each participant to be used during the second interview. These memos also helped the researcher identify recurring themes. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), official documents might include meeting agendas (in this case, professional learning syllabi), school handbooks (or professional learning course catalogs), mission statements, newsletters, professional learning course proposals, and other school-or district-produced documents. Documents were subjected to line-by-line review and coding, as were interview transcripts, and data obtained from documents was labeled in accordance with their source for the purpose of subsequent source identification during retrieval.

Research Journal

The researcher used a research journal to record reflections and memos. Memos “represent the development of codes from which they are derived. . . . By making memos systematically while coding, the researcher fills out and builds the categories” (Charmaz, 1994, p. 106). Before analyzing the data, the researcher read each transcript and wrote general memos in her research journal. In addition, the journal contained a calendar and a research log that documented the nature and flow of work, as well as information related to the overall progress of the study. The researcher also coded memos and
reflections in the journal. Methodological notes were kept in the research journal as well. These notes were primarily written about the research procedures. For instance, they included detailed information about procedures followed during site selection, research approval completion, and sample selection and interviewing. They also contained notes related to analyzing data.

Grounded Theory Methodology

According to Taylor and Bogdan (1998), methodology “refers to the way in which we approach problems and seek answers” (p. 3). The methodology used in this study of teachers’ perspectives of the career-stage appropriateness of professional learning programs was grounded theory. Strauss and Corbin (1994) described grounded theory as “a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed. Theory evolves during actual research, and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection” (p. 273).

Grounded theory methodology results in theory that “will fit and work” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Theories, according to LeCompte and Preissle (1993), are “statements about how things are connected. Their purpose is to explain why things happen as they do” (p. 118). Grounded theory methodology allows theory to emerge from the data (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998; Charmaz, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Glaser and Strauss (1967) stated, “Generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research” (p. 6).
Generating theory occurs as the researcher learns how the actors interpret their perspectives of their world. Additionally, grounded theory requires the development of theory based on those interpretations, and perspectives become incorporated into (the researcher’s) own interpretations (perspectives) (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998; Charmaz, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Charmaz (1994) proposed that the emergence of theory grounded in the data is facilitated by the use of several different tactics. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) articulated the following strategies: (a) collection and analysis of data determine the process of how future data is collected, (b) verification of data is not required due to the fact that ongoing, systematic checking of data is part of the methodology, and (c) final interpretation of the data is not feasible. Charmaz (1994) stated that grounded theorists study process rather than seek to make final interpretation. Glaser and Strauss (1967) also observed that theory is a process, an “ever-developing entity, not a perfected product” (p. 32).

The constant comparative method of analysis is central to grounded theory methodology. It involves what Strauss and Corbin (1998) described as “continuous interplay between analysis and data collection” (p. 273). It implements continual comparison of new information with previously gathered information. As a result, categories emerge. As new categories emerge, the researcher is compelled to review previous data to determine the direction of future data collection. Close attention to this process ensures that a theory, not an answer or a solution, emerges.

**Rationale for Use of Grounded Theory Methodology in the Study**

This researcher used grounded theory methodology because the data related to teachers’ perspectives of career-stage appropriate professional learning were relatively
unexplored. Stern (1994) argued “the strongest case for the use of grounded theory is in investigation of relatively uncharted waters, or to gain a fresh perspective in a familiar situation” (p. 116). Evaluation questionnaires tend to concentrate on the level of the participant’s teaching assignment (i.e., PreK-12), the participant’s role in education (e.g., teacher, counselor, administrator), the performance of the instructor (e.g., well-prepared, effective use of time, coverage of content), the mode of presentation (e.g., lecture, demonstration, visitation), and the quality of the learning environment (e.g., room temperature, seating arrangement, tasty snacks) (Guskey, 2000). Additionally, questionnaires tend to be closed-ended, offering a range of pre-determined numbers or evaluative phrases from which the participants choose. This study was designed to investigate a less-targeted area: teachers’ perspectives of the career-stage appropriateness of their professional learning programs. As Stern suggested as the purpose of grounded theory, this study took an unfamiliar look at a familiar situation.

**Four Phases of Constant Comparative Method**

Constant comparative analysis was used in this study to generate grounded theory focused on the teachers’ perspectives of career-stage appropriate professional learning. Glaser and Strauss (1967) described the phases of constant comparative analysis: (a) comparing incidents, (b) creating categories and their properties, (c) delimiting the theory, and (d) writing the theory. They contended that methodically working through these phases results in theory grounded in data. In this section, the four phases are described in more detail.
Phase One: Comparing Incidents

The first phase of constant comparative analysis, comparing incidents, consists of coding each incident into as many different categories as possible while simultaneously comparing incidents “with the previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 106). According to Glaser (1994), “Coding, the initial phase of the analytic method, is simply the process of categorizing and sorting data” (p. 97). Coding is the essential process of analysis through summarizing, synthesizing, and sorting many notes made of the data. When analyzing this study, the researcher compared incidents in multiple steps. The first step was to recognize and label repeated phrases, words, or descriptions between and among interview transcripts. Comparison of incidents resulted in the generation of theoretical properties of a category. This constant analysis resulted in the emergence of theories. The researcher then grouped similarly labeled data into categories.

There are two categories for this data: those constructed by the researcher and those constructed from the actual words of the participants. As the coding continued, the researcher simultaneously wrote notes based on personal thoughts about ideas or trends she saw evolving. This researcher used her personal notes to construct categories for the data. Charmaz (1994) described these memos as “written elaborations of ideas about the data and the coded categories” and asserted that “memo writing connects the barebones analytic framework that coding provides with the polished ideas developed in the finished draft” (p. 106). Three categories emerged from the researcher’s ideas: content, presenter, and delivery model. On subsequent analysis of the data, the researcher color coded the participants’ actual words using a different color highlighter to identify
different details, one color for content, one color for presenter, and one color for delivery model. The categories were then populated with the color-coded words of the participants.

**Phase Two: Integrating Categories and Their Properties**

Integrating categories and their properties is the second phase of constant comparative analysis. This stage requires the researcher to compare incidents to categories. During this stage, the researcher identifies properties of the categories that resulted in the first stage of incident comparison and discovers the relationships between properties and categories. As coding continues in the second phase of comparative analysis, the researcher begins to expand and integrate the categories by comparing incidents within and between them. Glaser and Strauss (1967) explained that the researcher identifies properties of the categories that emerged from the first stage and uncovers connections between properties and categories. They also explained that “constant comparison causes the accumulated knowledge pertaining to a property of the category to readily start to become integrated; that is, related in many different ways, resulting in a unified whole” (p. 109). This researcher continued in the second phase of comparative analysis by recognizing that even though all of the items within a category were of the same color, items in these categories still had unique characteristics. For instance, although practicing with manipulatives when learning to teach math would be considered a hands-on activity in its most literal sense, using the computer to access educational web sites about using manipulatives could also be considered a hands-on activity. This process of integrating categories and their properties helped the researcher explore possible theoretical connections with each comparison. As a result, “theory
develops, as different categories and their properties tend to become integrated through constant comparisons that force the analyst to make some related theoretical sense of each comparison (Glaser, 1994, p. 189).

Phase Three: Delimiting the Theory

Delimiting the theory is the third phase of constant comparative analysis. Delimiting occurs at two levels: the theory and the categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). During the delimiting stage, theory is solidified, and adjustments are made to sculpt the theory and categories into a clearer concept. When analyzing the data for this study, the researcher once again examined the categories and properties, discovered regularities, combined comparable or convergent categories, and removed irrelevant properties of categories. Categories that no longer fit were also removed, and the researcher refined the coding and incident analysis. For example, the data of this study described a career-stage appropriate presenter as one who was credible. This credibility was earned when the presenter had actual teaching experience. However, further scrutiny of the data revealed that the study participants required the presenter’s teaching experience to be recent. The presenter’s recent experience also contributed to the category of relevant content of career-stage appropriate professional learning. Further analysis helped to consolidate data into broader delimited categories. In accordance with Glaser (1994), comparison of incidents continued, but this time with a smaller set of categories. Theoretical saturation occurs when the addition of new data no longer adds new insight to a category (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), at which point the researcher has delimited the theory. For this study, theoretical saturation was evident when the data was already entered in existing categories.
Phase Four: Writing the Theory

The final phase of constant comparative analysis is writing the theory. Writing the theory enables the researcher to publish the findings of his or her study to inform others in the same field. When writing the theory, the researcher collects and arranges all memos on each category, investigates them, and creates an analytic framework. When the researcher is content that the framework forms a plausible statement of what studying the data reveals and that other members of the field can use this statement to inform their own work, the findings are published (Glaser, 1994). In the case of this study, the framework reflected the career stages (apprentice, professional, and expert) and the themes (career-stage appropriate content, career-stage appropriate presenter, and career-stage appropriate delivery model) represented by the interviews. The theories that resulted involved apprentice teachers’ perspectives of career-stage appropriate professional learning, professional teachers’ perspectives of career-stage appropriate professional learning, and expert teachers’ perspectives of career-stage appropriate professional learning. The final steps in writing consisted of filling out the findings, choosing the best quote to illustrate the point, eliminating any duplication, and editing. Throughout the writing process, quality checks were run by asking whether the findings presented answered the research questions and whether the categories were defined, described, and illustrated in sufficient detail to demonstrate the findings.

Four Components of Constant Comparative Analysis

The four components of constant comparative analysis, identified by Glaser and Strauss (1967), are theoretical sensitivity, theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation, and theoretical pacing.
Theoretical Sensitivity

Glaser (1992) defined theoretical sensitivity as “an ability to generate concepts from data and to relate them according to the normal models of theory in general, and theory development in sociology, in particular” (p. 27). According to Blumer (1969), sensitizing ideas provides the analysis with a “general sense of reference” and “directions along which to look” (p. 148). It is based on two elements: the researcher’s familiarity with the subject (through extensive reading and personal experience) and the researcher’s ability to bring merit to the grounded theory method through a high level understanding, analysis, conceptualization, and theorizing. The result of higher sensitivity is an increased ability to recognize and give meaning to relevant data.

Theoretical sensitivity of this researcher was enhanced by her personal and professional experiences. For instance, at the time of the study, the researcher had been a participant in professional learning for 27 years and discussed her career-stage professional learning needs with other teachers who had participated in professional learning. In addition, as a career teacher, the researcher recognized that her professional learning needs changed as she moved through different career stages. These experiences led to increased insight and greater understanding of events during her study participants’ professional learning and their reactions to and beliefs about these events. Also, as a presenter of professional learning, this researcher had experienced reactions to the feelings and beliefs that the participants demonstrated. Her reflection on these experiences and understanding aided in analyzing data and in generating theory. Familiarity with the literature on career stages and best practices in professional learning also increased the researcher’s theoretical sensitivity.
Theoretical Sampling

Glaser and Strauss (1967) defined theoretical sampling as “the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges” (p. 45). Glaser and Strauss also argued that one purpose of theoretical sampling is to expand the researcher’s understanding of the incidents being analyzed. Charmaz (1994) stated that theoretical sampling “refines, elaborates, and exhausts conceptual categories” (p. 112). It is the process that directs data collection grounded on the emerging theory. To guide data collection and to pursue emerging theory, the researcher used this methodological strategy. Specifically, as data were collected and coded, similar incidents were found. Theoretical sampling of a category is exhausted when “it is saturated, elaborated, and integrated into the emerging theory” (Glaser, 1992, p. 102).

Theoretical Saturation

Theoretical saturation of a category occurs when “coding and analyzing result in no new properties and when the same properties continually emerge as one goes through the full extent of the data” (Glaser, 1967, p. 53). Strauss and Corbin (1998) recognized that theoretical saturation happens when the researcher can generalize and predict concepts. Thus, when no new categories emerged and when no new insights to existing categories were evident, the researcher concluded that categories were theoretically saturated.
Theoretical Pacing

Theoretical pacing refers to the pace of the researcher. To code and analyze at a constant pace with data collection requires self-discipline. Accordingly, the researcher scheduled her interviews whenever possible in the morning or when it was convenient for her study participants. Later that same day, the researcher listened to the audiotapes and wrote memos about their content in her research journal. The interview tapes were transcribed within a few days of their collection, and analysis immediately followed. The researcher took care to see that interviews were scheduled at a pace that allowed analysis to keep pace with collection. From a technical perspective, Glaser (1978) stated that there are two stages of theoretical pacing: input and saturation. It is reasonable for the researcher to spend two to four hours daily coding or writing memos or text. Saturation occurs when this input does not yield new ideas.

Data Management

The primary source of data for this study was in-depth interviews. Other sources included documents and researcher notes, including memos. Interviews were tape-recorded with the participants’ permission and were transcribed in a timely manner. Each transcript was labeled with a participant pseudonym and the number of the interview in the series of twelve. The researcher read each interview transcription line-by-line, marked incidents with a highlighter, and assigned preliminary labels in the margin of that page. In a computer file, the researcher identified each incident by source, page, and/or line number. The researcher then read the transcript again and created a chart of the interview in which types of data were grouped together and supporting quotes were entered. When the researcher noted new incidents, she compared them to previous
incidents. This comparison resulted in grouping similar incidents into categories, which were also assigned a label. Incidents fitting into multiple categories were recorded more than once. The researcher analyzed documents and memos in the same manner. As categories emerged, the researcher analyzed them and wrote memos to expand her thoughts. Memos were used to correlate the relationships between data and the categories, to follow the evolving theory, and to elaborate on the hypothesis. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) suggested developing a story line, “the analytic thread that unites and integrates the major themes in a study” (p. 151). Data were used to develop the theory, which determined the final outcome of the study.

Credibility

Credibility, as applied to research, is achieved when a study is believable and can be trusted. Furthermore, the theory generated from the study must be believable, and the findings must represent the realities of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Strauss and Corbin (1998) argued this same position: “The real merit of a substantive theory lies in its ability to speak specifically for the populations from which it was derived and to apply back to them” (p. 267).

Credibility Criteria

Fit, work, relevance, and modifiability are the specific criteria for judging grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Each of these terms is briefly discussed in the following subsections and were used in the study to ensure credibility.

Fit

Fit means that the categories of the theory are directly drawn from the data and are applicable to the study (Glaser, 1978): “By ‘fit’ we mean that the categories must be
readily (not forcibly) applicable to and indicated by the data under study” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 3). Because categories were derived directly from the data and reflected what the participants considered career-stage appropriate professional learning, the researcher is confident of their fit.

Work

Work is the ability of the grounded theory to explain the actions that are studied: “By ‘work’ we mean that they must be meaningfully relevant to and be able to explain the behavior under study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 3). Because the researcher derived categories from the participants’ explanations and descriptions of their professional learning experiences and because she continually asked herself what the data was revealing about the participants’ perspectives of career-stage appropriate professional learning, she is confident that the data reflect those beliefs and are meaningful to the participants. A theory will work if its categories fit and if it is relevant.

Relevance

Relevance means the categories have significant connections to the research settings. Glaser (1978) argued that “grounded theory arrives at relevance because it allows core problems and processes to emerge” (p. 5). Again, because the categories were derived directly from the data, and data were not forced into preconceived categories, the researcher is confident that they are relevant to the specific research.

Modifiability

As applied to grounded theory, modifiability requires that “generation is an ever modifying process and nothing is sacred if the analyst is dedicated to giving priority attention to the data” (Glaser, 1978, p. 5). According to Charmaz (1994), “A grounded
theory is flexible because researchers can modify their emerging or established analyses as conditions change or further data are gathered” (p. 511). Implicit in modifiability is the understanding that the researcher will know the data. To this end, this researcher approached the data by using different analytical tools. This researcher listened to, read, reread, color-coded, labeled, charted, and outlined the data in order to understand it.

_Credibility Techniques_

The researcher employed several techniques to ensure the credibility of this study and its findings. These techniques are discussed in the following subsections.

_Prolonged Engagement_

Prolonged engagement refers to the amount of time the researcher is engaged in the research setting and implies a sufficient amount of time to provide scope and depth to the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This researcher attended the professional learning programs of each study participant for the purpose of observing and gathering a detailed understanding of the course and how the participants act. Furthermore, the researcher began each interview slowly by not pushing her agenda too early. As a result, the researcher had the opportunity to “learn what is important in the minds of the participants: their meanings, perspectives, and definitions; how they view, categorize, and experience the world” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 99). During the audio-taped interviews, the researcher listened, jotted memos, and paid careful attention to build rapport and trust with the participants, as well as to minimize distractions.

_Peer Debriefing_

Every researcher needs to maintain a clear perspective and be free of “emotions and feelings that may be clouding good judgment or preventing emergence of sensible
next steps” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). On a regular basis, this researcher consulted with a “critical friend” to assist her in following methodological procedures, avoiding bias contamination, and working through interpretations.

**Thick Description**

Thick, rich description of the participants assists readers in their understanding of the study and in their appraisal of the transferability of the findings to other situations. As such, it also enables readers to determine how closely the research situation matches their own. Since the participants in this study had previous experiences with professional learning, they were able to articulate their professional learning needs. Also, they were able to supply thick description in the forms of examples, personal experiences, and anecdotes. In addition, the researcher thickly described the research process to provide the reader with a context for comparison.

**Member Checks**

Member checks, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), are the most crucial technique in establishing credibility because participants are allowed to review the data, findings, and interpretations of their words and then dispute them if they deem necessary. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) attested that “any interpretation of a social scene will be richer if you induce members of that scene to comment on it and react to it” (p. 159). In this study, member checks were used when clarifying the content of each participant’s initial interview. During interviews, the researcher summarized points and asked if her understanding of what was said was correct. Also, the researcher facilitated this clarification through a second interview. The questions used in the second interview
were based on ideas expressed in the initial interview. This researcher placed great value on the findings of the member check.

Subjectivity Statement

My professional background is that of a high school educator. I have taught every language arts course, ethnic background, grade level, and tracked group of high school students assigned to me. I have also taught all levels of French in three different high schools. I realized quickly that a “one size fits all” mentality on my part was not facilitating each student’s learning. I began to see that I was going to have to teach differently than I was taught and to adapt my practices to the needs of my students. Therefore, I have spent most of my time dealing with diverse learning styles and teaching methods as they relate to my students’ achievement. I learned quickly that test scores, attendance rates, grade levels, failure rates, and other ways of numerically “identifying” my students seemed arbitrary, even contrived. Recently, the political trend to determine my worth as an educator based on my students’ test scores has made me even more adamant about the inherent danger in what is often considered the only true source of truth: numbers. It naturally follows then that my broad theoretical framework is not quantitative but qualitative.

Years later, I am still interested in the effect of “one size fits all” teaching, but not as it pertains to instruction of adolescents. My current focus is on adult learning, specifically teachers in different stages of their careers and their beliefs about, responses to, and attitudes toward the formalized professional learning programs in which they participate. During my 27 years as an educator, I have participated in and conducted formalized professional learning programs. As I passed through the different stages of
my career, my professional needs changed, but, until recently, professional learning had not. Many times as a participant, I endured, bored and angry, a class to which I would never have subjected my students. The information and presentations were too often canned and stale. Sometimes they were also irrelevant to my individual developmental needs as a teacher. As a result, I developed strong feelings about the importance of career-stage appropriateness of professional learning programs. In addition, my roles as teacher leader, department chair, and assistant principal in charge of continuous improvement directed me toward investigating other teachers’ perspectives of the appropriateness of professional learning to their individual career needs. In addition, I have spent the last eight years establishing and leading mentoring programs in two high schools. I learned from these experiences that new teachers are at different levels of readiness and that each teacher has his or her individual career needs. Though my biases were important to this study, I conscientiously tried to make sure my interview questions, reflective listening responses, and body language did not influence the responses of my study participants. My personal opinions and experiences remained private as I attempted to generate unbiased data.

As an Educational Leadership student and as a high school administrator responsible for on-site professional learning, new teacher induction, and continuous improvement, I am acutely aware that teachers at different career stages have different individual professional needs. Many current formal professional learning programs do not faithfully address this aspect of teacher diversity.
Summary

Chapter 3 provided an overview and discussion of the methodology that was used in this dissertation study. Symbolic interactionism is the theoretical framework, and the methodology is grounded theory. Constant comparative analysis and theoretical sampling were used to develop a grounded theory based on data.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe teachers’ perspectives of the career-stage appropriateness of professional growth opportunities offered in one countywide school system in the southeastern United States. The central research question was “what are teachers’ perspectives of the career-stage appropriateness of their formal professional learning programs?” More specifically, the intent was to discover teachers’ beliefs about and attitudes toward the effectiveness of professional learning activities (i.e., whether professional learning activities met teachers’ needs). To achieve the purpose of the study and to arrive at theory grounded in the data, the researcher analyzed the interview responses of the twelve participants about their individual perspectives of the career-stage appropriateness of their formal professional learning programs and identified common themes and categories among them. Using grounded theory methodology, the researcher identified the thematic ideas that emerged from analysis and interpretation of the collected data.

There are two major sections in this chapter. The first section presents detailed background information about each participant in the study. The second section reports findings from the qualitative interviews with twelve participating teachers (three apprentice teachers, three professional teachers, and six expert teachers) and categorizes those findings into common themes across the represented career stages. The interviews were transcribed, reviewed, and coded, and the similarities and differences were noted.
Patterns that linked the individual career stages were further reviewed, and overarching themes across career stages were identified to represent the final analysis of data. These patterns and themes are discussed as they relate not only to professional learning needs of teachers in individual career stages but also to professional learning needs across all career stages. The findings are organized in two ways. First, the complete findings for each career stage are presented in outline form. This outline is followed by (a) a summary description for each career stage and (b) a complete discussion of individual themes as they pertain to all career stages.

Participant Profile

This section describes each participant and their self-identified career stages. The stages were determined by each teacher’s professional history and behaviors instead of number of years of experience. The participant introductions provide insight into their perspectives of the career-stage appropriateness of formal professional learning programs. The study participants were all employed by Grand County Public Schools as classroom teachers with experience ranging from less than 1 year to 31 years. Each participant self-identified his or her career stage by referring to and selecting from descriptors for each stage (see Appendix C) before participating in the interview designed for this study. The variety of years of experience within each career stage supports the idea that teacher behavior, not time, determine career stage. An overview of the study participants and their self-identified career stages is presented in Table 4.1.

Career Stages

Understanding the professional learning preferences of the study participants necessitates familiarity with teacher career stages. More than one prominent force guides
Table 4.1

Demographic Data for All Participants in Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/Gender/Age</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Years at Current School</th>
<th>Current Grade Level</th>
<th>Subject Area</th>
<th>Career Stage</th>
<th>Degree Earned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheila Miller/F/37</td>
<td>&lt; 1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Apprentice</td>
<td>B.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa Papa/F/28</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>Theatre Arts</td>
<td>Apprentice</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonard Joseph/M/47</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>Theatre Arts</td>
<td>Apprentice</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becky Pringle/F/28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Lang. Arts</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>M.Ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fran Robins/F/30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>M.Ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Clements/M/45</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janet Hand/F/32</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>M.Ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peggy Smeal/F/47</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>M.Ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leahanne Merritt/F/55</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3,5</td>
<td>Gifted</td>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>M.Ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Angelo/M/39</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>Theatre</td>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>M.Ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie Burt/F/52</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>Theatre Arts</td>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>Ed. S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth Wagner/F/37</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>Gifted</td>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>M.Ed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As they choose professional learning activities, one of these forces is the teacher’s current stage in the career cycle. One highly respected teacher growth model is detailed in *The Life Cycle of the Career Teacher* (Steffy et al., 2000). This model is based on the idea that teachers continue to grow and develop throughout their professional careers, provided they are in an appropriate learning environment. The model presents and details an ongoing progression that takes place throughout the lifecycle of a teacher, from novice to emeritus. However, because this study involved only practicing teachers, the novice and emeritus stages were not applicable. The novice teacher stage only involves practicum, field experience, or student teachers, also referred to as pre-service.
teachers. The emeritus teacher stage marks a lifetime of achievement in education. These teachers have formally retired but, because of their expertise and devotion, continue to contribute to the profession. For these reasons, novice and emeritus teachers were not included in this study. Appendix C describes each stage in the life cycle of the career teacher.

_Apprentice Teacher Profiles_

The apprentice stage begins for most teachers when they receive responsibility for planning and delivering instruction on their own. These teachers are filled with energy and anticipation. Notwithstanding feelings of self-doubt, many love teaching and believe they have the skills to assure that all children will achieve at high levels. Apprentice teachers tend to be idealistic, and they are passionate about helping students succeed.

_Sheila Miller_

Having taught for less than one year at the time of the study, Sheila Miller had the least amount of teaching experience. Accordingly, she had not taken many professional learning classes. Sheila had a provisional certificate and was participating in professional learning to earn her first clear and renewable teaching certificate. She had been hired to teach high school math to lower ability students. As a beginning teacher, she struggled to balance the responsibilities of her young family, her new teaching position, and her pending certification. In addition to being overwhelmed, she was frustrated because her academically unmotivated students were challenging her classroom management skills. She felt that the students were behaving poorly because she was doing something wrong. As a result, she left school everyday “so fatigued and stressed out.”
Sheila felt she needed two types of professional learning. One in which she was engaged informed her of school procedures:

We do have meetings at school called “new crew” meetings, where they talk about just procedures. It would just be specifically for your county and your school. You know, how do you handle this situation? What do you do about tardies? What do you do about . . . and probably as with most teachers, classroom management?

She wanted to know how to deal with specific situations or to clarify something she did not understand: “I guess I just want information and something written down so that you don’t have to try to remember everything . . . and then you would still have a chance to ask questions about it.” Sheila needed to feel sure she was doing her job right by “following all of the rules.” This type of professional learning was also appropriate for learning about new technology because there was instruction with hands-on practice, accompanied by printed material for clarification. She wanted to receive this kind of information efficiently. Although she recognized her need for “new crew” meetings, she did not enjoy them: “They’re not interesting. It’s good information, information I’m glad to have and need and want, but interesting? No.”

The other type of professional learning Sheila felt she needed gave her the opportunity to learn from the experiences of other teachers. Instead of being told how to deal with situations, she looked for how to deal with students. She wanted to hear about different circumstances and others’ experiences and ideas. She looked forward to hearing different perspectives of similar problems:
We all discuss; we all participate. [The presenter] puts us in groups and we do different activities and . . . get to talk to each other, and then get back together as a group and find out what everyone has come up with. Maybe one’s going to match up with something you have and give you an idea that you could try. I really enjoy that.

Sheila valued working together to solve dilemmas, partly because she did not want to feel obtuse around her peers. Although this kind of class was interesting, fun, and supportive, she realized that this delivery model would not work for a “procedures kind of class.”

*Melissa Papa*

Melissa Papa had already earned her clear and renewable teaching certificate and had successfully completed one year of teaching. Even though her credentials were valid for four more years, Ms. Papa engaged in professional learning to gather new and practical information. She also enjoyed networking with colleagues, especially in her theater content area. Melissa wanted “anything that [she] could take from the learning to the classroom.” Because she was a theatre production “techie” in college and not an actress, she felt she had lots of unique information to share with peers, “like why everybody keeps popping fuses when they try and do a performance in their cafeteria.” As a middle-school teacher, she realized that peers were valuable resources for know-how and sharing scarce equipment. However, she was challenged by the reality that she was the only teacher of drama in her school. She was a team of one. As a result, the only way she could collaborate with others in her content area was to meet with middle school teachers of drama from other schools.
Ms. Papa also recognized the value of two kinds of professional learning. One of them was to present local procedures and required information, such as professional ethics and Adequate Yearly Progress. One topic she referred to with surprise was the variety of tests that the students had to take. She was also interested in finding out about lunchroom, media center, and bus duty protocols:

I’m still trying to organize. . . . It took over a semester to find out what a “red pass” meant, and that meant you could send kids to In-School Suspension. . . . I didn’t know there was a form for detention until half way through my second nine weeks when I had a nervous breakdown and was like, “I don’t know what to do!” Clearly, Melissa wanted information about daily practices so that she could manage her responsibilities.

The other type of professional learning that Melissa felt she needed was related to her content area. She believed that if professional learning did not benefit her classroom, it was “the biggest waste” of her time. As a connections teacher, she changed students every nine weeks. Unlike core content teachers, she did not have the same students all year long; consequently, she valued participating in professional learning with others who taught drama: “We taught each other lessons, which was better than just saying ‘Here’s what I do; here’s the papers I give out.’ Even though most of the topics were things obviously we already knew, there were approaches that were different, which was good.” She realized that even if one of these lessons was something that would not necessarily work verbatim in her classroom, she could modify it and change it to fit her teaching situation. In addition to discussion, Melissa also enjoyed learning from a professional who worked in the real world: “On the last day, we actually brought in a guy from
Barbazon Lighting and talked about lighting instruments and electricity and things that we didn’t necessarily all know.” She felt that exposure to this kind of information helped her solve problems when trying to work on a limited budget or with limited equipment.

*Leonard Joseph*

Leonard Joseph was a modern renaissance man. He had previously earned degrees in accounting and piano performance and had completed one year of nursing school. He had worked in the worlds of computers and business from the time he graduated from college until 2001. Although he had been in his current school for a total of five years, Leonard Joseph had spent the first three years as a paraprofessional and chorus accompanist and only the last two as a teacher. He also played the organ at weddings. His experience as a keyboard musician kept him busy in community and high school theatre. As an educator, he was especially interested in fostering a sense of responsibility in his students:

> Communication is so, so often the key to everything. I’ve been working really hard to teach these middle schoolers that, ‘Yah, here are the rules. You’re allowed to miss two rehearsals. If you’re sick, that can be the third one. I don’t want you here with your germs, but you have to still communicate with me. Let me know when you’re not going be there.’

He felt that by requiring students to contact him before missing a rehearsal, he was making them realize that their absences affected the rest of the rehearsal. Mr. Joseph said he participated in professional learning for growth and new knowledge.

Mr. Joseph did not mention a personal need for induction-type professional learning. In reference to one specific occasion, he said, “Well, [the principal] could have
given me that and, you know, let me file that in my resources.” Because he had been a paraprofessional in his current school before being a teacher there, he was already aware of policies and procedures at the county and local school levels. In fact, he was angered by the requirement of attending various types of repetitive faculty meetings, especially during planning time:

We had to get our lunch and sit and eat while we did this. We weren’t told that this was going to be countywide. It sounded like our local principal was making us do all this. We were reading the book of professional learning communities, and we’ve done that same thing all over again this last year. I just didn’t need—none of us did.

Mr. Joseph felt forced to put in his time so that his principal could document that everyone in the building had been trained. He commented how these types of mandatory meetings had not only infringed on his time but also resulted in school-wide low morale.

The type of professional learning that Mr. Joseph felt he needed was related to his content area: “What I look for first is whether [the professional learning topic] hits the areas that I have not focused on as much so that I can gather resources to do better in those areas.” He signed up for classes that offered new learning or extended his limited drama background. He also liked to learn new approaches to what he already did because they gave him ways to improve on his practice. Mr. Joseph also liked to learn from other teachers of drama. Because he was the only teacher of drama in his building, he asked his principal to give him a professional day to go to another school so he could observe another teacher:
The first year, I went and observed the lead teacher of our content area since she would be the most seasoned, more experienced at it. Last year, I decided to go observe someone who was fresh out of college to see what energy levels I might pull off of him. . . . It was beneficial, . . . a nice energy boost to go observe this person.

Mr. Joseph also mentioned that he liked to attend conferences. He liked to watch other schools perform and hear the college-level feedback that they were given. Those sessions gave him the opportunity to see and hear how his ideas and practices measured up to those of others, to reflect on his professional practice, and to determine his learning needs.

Professional Teacher Profiles

Teachers enter the professional stage as they grow in their self-confidence as educators. Student feedback plays a critical role in this process. Professional teachers view themselves as student advocates. They are competent, solid, and dependable. Most view themselves as classroom teachers with no aspirations to become administrators. These teachers are happiest when interacting with students. Comfortable seeking help and assistance from other teachers, professional teachers actively participate in a collegial network for support and guidance. They see themselves and their colleagues as part of a broader profession and value opportunities to observe colleagues’ innovative practices.

Robert Clements

Robert Clements had earned his bachelor’s degree in English and drama several years prior to this study. Although he started teaching language arts at a nearby high school, he had been teaching for a total of eighteen years, most of them as a drama
teacher at his current school. As a high school drama teacher, he worked with grades nine through twelve. In addition to teaching, Mr. Clements was the president of a local theater in the small community where he lived. Mr. Clements said he participated in formal professional learning for the recertification credits, the stipend, and the networking.

Mr. Clements had no personal need for anyone to lecture him on policies, procedures, or classroom management:

Anytime somebody is standing in front of a class giving a lecture, that’s, I think as far as for me, that’s just inappropriate. I don’t have a problem anymore with discipline in the classroom. And truthfully, I think if any teacher has been teaching more than fifteen years and has problems with discipline, then they need to find something else.

Mr. Clements felt that a second or third year teacher was in a different spot than he. To him, a lecture was one person speaking to an entire group of at least twenty or twenty-five people. He did not believe that, unless that person was a comedian just trying to entertain, anyone could talk about something for an hour that could be really useful to everyone in the audience: “All they can dispense is data, information, but I don’t see that as being really applicable because every situation is different.” He felt he needed something that was “seriously applicable” in a classroom. He summed up his feelings about lecture by saying, “You can talk to me for ten minutes, but other than that, we better be involved.”

According to Mr. Clements, the best professional learning programs were the ones that he was actively involved in. One of the ways he chose to be involved was by creating a product:
They had a CD with a template on there that I was then able to call up, work with, go to the internet, find some images and create our own very quick, very brief publicity packet. [I was] actually able to produce something useful, for what it is that I have to do . . . promoting the program and being able to give that template to students and say, “Hey, you guys, now do this.”

In addition to preparing to give his students at school the practical experience of creating something relevant, Mr. Clements needed time during professional learning to work with new material: “It’s a nice thing to have that half an hour.” He did not feel he had additional time of his own to practice using a new tool. Another way Mr. Clements liked to be involved in his professional learning was to collaborate with colleagues: “The best PLUs [professional learning units] are the ones when we get together with colleagues and we are able to talk about problems that we are having, solutions, and new ideas.” He felt that a mix of participants between new teachers and veteran teachers was good: “New teachers ask questions that make me rethink stuff. I think that’s a good idea. I may already have the answer to how do I handle this, but it is very likely that I’ll hear two other ways that somebody handles it.” One more way that Mr. Clements liked to be involved in his learning was attending conferences, where he saw professionals, those who were in the business of theater:

At a Thespian conference, . . . we see a whole bunch of shows, and we go to a whole bunch of workshops, and the workshops are done by professionals. So they’ll bring in people from New York and then professional actors and technicians from Atlanta and everywhere.
He also liked going to thespian conferences because he was able to ask questions of college representatives about what they were doing. As a theater teacher, Mr. Clements felt he benefited from finding out what colleges looked for in prospective students. He needed to know their expectations just as much as the students did. According to Mr. Clements, active participation in professional learning provided him with opportunities to see possibilities, especially production possibilities.

*Robin Joseph*

Robin Joseph had been teaching for seven years. During that time, she also completed her education specialist degree in leadership. She had been at the same school for her entire career, but her teaching assignment had changed. At the time of this study, Ms. Joseph had completed her first year as a fourth grade teacher. She participated in professional learning to learn more.

Interestingly enough, Ms. Joseph did not mention any situation in which lecture appropriately met her professional learning needs:

> And honestly, in one of those sit kind of things, I mean, I’m like making my grocery list; I’m making my list of things to do because I’m just sitting there. I’m totally unengaged. I am totally not caring what the person’s saying because they’re not making it interesting for me.

When she attended a session that provided “tons of great ideas,” she only felt they were helpful if accompanied with time to reflect about how to apply them in her classroom. She valued having an example to use with her students the very next day if she chose to:

> I want anything that I can take back and use immediately. . . . I find that more beneficial than somebody just giving me ideas, and me not being able to have a
“make and take.” . . . I’ve been to tons of opportunities where you go and they just give you idea after idea, but you just never make it, and you never use it in your class because you forget about it. . . . It’s useless because I don’t ever put it into action.

Ms. Joseph became frustrated when she felt all she came away with was a stack of papers. Those kinds of professional learning experiences caused her to shut down. She felt it was a poor way to teach anyone, whether students, teachers, or business people. Ms. Joseph referred to all the paperwork that she had collected and never filed or used as her “staff development stack”:

That’s just a bunch of paper to me. I just don’t feel like for anything that that’s the best delivery system. I don’t want somebody to stand up there and read me exactly what they’re handing me. If people are investing their time in teaching this course, I want them to know what they’re talking about.

In her opinion, the worst example of this approach was textbook adoption: “They sit up there, and they read to you from the textbook.”

Furthermore, Ms. Joseph felt she needed class time to interact with new knowledge because she had designated that time slot for learning: “I do try and put myself out there and take a lot of courses. I just feel like if I don’t have time to do it then, I just push it off to the waysides, and I don’t ever get around to doing it.” Ms. Joseph acknowledged that she would not use her free time doing homework. Because she learned best by doing, she rarely read school-related articles, unless they were short. She was not going to spend personal time researching new teaching ideas. She chose to participate in professional learning because someone else had done the research ahead of time.
Ms. Joseph felt professional learning experiences that best met her needs involved interaction. Not only did she refer to interaction with new content; she also referred to interaction with peers. She wanted her instructor to be her peer. Ms. Joseph wanted to hear about something that the presenter had actually tried in the classroom. She wanted to know what to do, how to do it, and what to expect from her students. Most importantly, she wanted to know that it would work. Another type of interaction Ms. Joseph valued involved talking with people from different schools and different environments to hear what worked for them. From those conversations, she gathered insight on how to address different learning styles, especially because many of her new students had come from these other schools:

If you put yourself out there with people from different situations, you’re going to learn a whole lot because there is a lot of great stuff going on across the country and across the state. I want to know what other people do and how other people get their kids motivated and how other people help their kids learn.

She also liked to put herself in the role of the child. Ms. Joseph felt that doing so helped her figure out the kinds of questions a student would ask and how she (as the teacher) would answer them. This imaginative activity was especially important because Ms. Joseph was in her first year teaching fourth grade, and fourth graders asked her different types of questions from the kindergarteners and first graders: “I want to play these games and I want to figure out how [the students’] brains are going to work and how they’re going to respond to these games.”
Becky Pringle

Ms. Pringle completed her master’s degree and teacher certification at the same time. As a result, she had only been teaching for three years at the time of the study. She was a seventh grade teacher of language arts at her current school for two of those three years. She participated in formalized professional learning to maintain her teaching certificate.

Ms. Pringle said she hated school-wide, required meetings because they did not meet her professional needs. In fact, she felt they were a waste of time because in many cases, she had heard the information before and was already well versed on the topic. She felt the first time was very informative, but after the second and third times, she became resentful: “There are a million other things I could be doing. I’m not going to participate in the meeting in a fulfilling way.” It was apparent to her that her prior learning on the topic was ignored. She was resentful not only because of the wasted time but also because she felt talked down to. Ms. Pringle understood that some teachers, however, would not attend meetings if they were not required. So she felt the positive result of mandatory meetings was that people attended them and that she could be with her colleagues in an organized fashion. Another situation that Ms. Pringle resented was being told to do something that did not apply to her classroom, especially when administrator monitoring accompanied it. Monitoring forged a connection between implementation of new material and her formal classroom evaluation, and she did not appreciate being treated in what she felt was an unprofessional manner. She said the worst example of professional learning was the “boot camp” that first year teachers in her county were required to endure:
They throw you into this huge pit of like all these other new teachers, and you just sit in these classrooms, and you’re just filled to the gills with information that you can’t process. It was too intensive, too long, intimidating, and not interactive enough. It seemed like the goal was to fill you with as much information in as little time as possible.

Ms. Pringle said that the best professional learning opportunities she participated in were those that involved teachers with relevant classroom experience. She enjoyed presenters who had recently been or who currently were in the classroom. They did not have to be from her content area, for it was “nice sometimes to have another perspective” from a teacher who taught science or math: “They might be doing something that I could apply to language arts.” She valued anecdotal information rather than solely theoretical information. After hearing how something worked in another teacher’s classroom, she could adapt it to her classroom needs:

Good professional learning classes I’ve had have been with other teachers that are really on the same page as me, . . . have a good handle on what’s going on in the classroom right now, and just telling me from their own personal experience what they found with various methods that they’re using.

Classes with other teachers were often interactive and gave opportunities to read several articles or work in groups, break down the information, and share all the articles with classmates. This interaction allowed her to narrow her focus and remember a few important ideas rather than be overloaded with so many ideas that she forgot them. It also gave her the chance to be doing something:
When I’m in meetings for an hour and it’s just one person talking and I’m supposed to be listening, I can’t focus on that. I need to be doing something and have a chance to apply what I’m learning, have a chance to figure out how I would use it.

She liked observing teachers because she could expose herself to different teaching styles. When she observed people teaching the same kind of lesson she was doing, she could compare herself to them. Conversely, she respected the peer-coaching approach to professional learning because she had the opportunity to tell her coach what to look for. She expected and welcomed sincere, intense, and specific critiques. She also liked to pick her own topics from a menu of offerings because, like peer coaching, she had ownership of her professional learning. Doing so gave her the power to fill in gaps or extend her knowledge based on self-determined needs. According to Ms. Pringle, her most exciting professional learning experience was attending the National Conference of Teachers of English. She had just completed her student teaching and was thrilled “just to be around other English teachers.” She recognized that teachers became really bogged down and isolated, resulting in their forgetting why they were teaching at all: “It’s just really cool being in a huge conference center full of English teachers that are passionate about what you’re passionate about . . . in a community of impassioned professionals.” Ms. Pringle particularly enjoyed a workshop on multi-genre research papers because it was so different from anything that she had heard before; the presenters had examples of their students’ work, and they gave “huge packets of stuff” that she could replicate and use in her own classroom. She especially welcomed not having to participate in any role-playing activities.
Expert Teacher Profiles

Expert teachers symbolize the achievement of the highest standards. They meet the expectations required for national certification. Expert teachers insightfully anticipate student responses and modify and adjust instruction to promote student growth. Teachers at this level competently support, facilitate, and nurture growth and development of all students, regardless of their backgrounds or ability levels. These teachers create an environment of mutual respect with their students. Expert teachers are able to reflect on their practice, facilitating growth and change in their students and themselves. They understand that students are inclined to learn.

Janet Hand

Ms. Hand had been teaching for ten years at the time of this study. Although she had ten years experience teaching second-year, third-year, and advanced-placement Spanish to tenth, eleventh, and twelfth graders, she had spent only the last two at her current school. Respected among her peers as a teacher leader, Ms. Hand had recently participated in a professional learning community class and piloted the program in her new school.

Ms. Hand felt that a professional learning experience was a waste of time when a topic was beat to death with a lot of unnecessary talk. She recalled one experience in particular: “They could have done it in a day, and they did it in like four. It seemed like they harped and harped and harped on.” She clearly did not value being talked to and preferred active engagement.

With her background in professional learning communities, Ms. Hand believed that collaboration best served her learning needs. When given time, collaborating
teachers talked through ideas, eliminated negatives, identified positives, and then worked good ideas into plans for implementation. She felt that the challenge was fitting collaboration into a high school teacher’s workday: “[teachers] need more time to collaborate with each other and with other counties.” In addition to collaboration, Ms. Hand appreciated receiving valuable resources to which she could refer for “how to” information. She valued these types of resources as opposed to books that she knew she did not have time to read.

She recognized the importance of seeing examples of how new information worked because they gave her ideas for how to fit them into her school:

They gave us a few examples of the successful applications of professional learning communities, and I valued that. Trying to fit that model into our school was probably the most beneficial of all that we did in those classes, not just telling us what it was, but showing us how it came into effect, . . . how it worked and that there had been schools that did it and were successful at it in fact.

Ms. Hand especially liked research data in the form of what worked and what did not work: “I like to see where they’ve actually done it in a school with three thousand kids. . . . You could tell that they knew it, that they liked it, and that it worked.” In fact, she felt that every new proposal should be researched-based in this manner. In addition, Ms. Hand respected when presenters paid attention to detail for the local school. They posed all the potential problems, offered practical, proven solutions, and recognized that there were data to support other possible solutions as well. She also felt that presenters should convey excitement, knowledge, and motivation.
Ms. Smeal had been teaching for eleven years at the time of this study. She had just completed her master’s degree. For the previous six years, she had worked with third graders. Although she was responsible for all subjects, she said she needed useful activities to draw on in her differentiated mathematics classroom.

Ms. Smeal mentioned her need for a knowledgeable instructor when participating in professional learning. In fact, the first item she considered when signing up for a class was the instructor. She found that when she took professional learning classes through her county system, the instructors were of a high quality: “I feel confident if they were hired and are a part of the school system. I have that much faith in our school system.” However, in her opinion, when outside consultants presented professional learning, they were not as effective: “I don’t want to say that they’re not well-trained, but they don’t present as well, not being a teacher. They’re just presenting their materials, and they don’t know how they really work in a classroom situation.” She believed it was important for instructors to have background information on the topic that they could share, such as relevant studies and what they demonstrated. Ms. Smeal looked for proof that a new methodology worked. She wanted “some instruction from the instructor,” but she primarily wanted materials and activities to take back to her classroom. Some examples she mentioned were hands-on activities, make and takes, and manipulatives. She liked to walk in and see that there were activities planned. She needed time during the professional learning to practice new skills and try them out:

I am and always have been a hands-on and a visual learner. I learn through doing, not through just reading. You know, there again, too, it depends on the staff.
development. Lots of modeling, even from a knowledgeable instructor, is very useful to me.

Another type of professional learning that Ms. Smeal found helpful was peer coaching because coaches actually came and taught a lesson in the teacher’s class. She had participated in coaching experiences in both math and writing and found them to be positive. In addition, she had often gone to other successful teachers and watched the experts in action. In these cases, her principal provided substitutes to take her place in her classroom. Ms. Smeal also enjoyed professional learning that provided the opportunity to practice teaching new content in front of others who were also learning that content. Although the observers were professionals, Ms. Smeal was not intimidated by them because even though some of them could have had their doctorates, they were still doing the same job that she was. They were still trying to be better teachers:

They’ll give honest feedback and sometimes criticism. They’re knowledgeable. They’re teaching, and they have ideas and activities that can either extend learning or provide remediation for some students. That’s a good place to go for suggestions.

Ms. Smeal did not need to study new material outside of class. Ms. Smeal felt that that format was appropriate for graduate school, not professional learning: “That’s another thing about staff development. You go to learn and bring home activities and not have to do a lot of outside work to where you have to study. It’s specifically related to your job.”

Ms. Smeal mentioned that there were some staff development activities that could stunt her professional growth: “If I walk in and it’s like ‘here’s the textbook; this is what we’re going to be doing. We’re just going to be reading and discussing articles in a
book,’ I can tell already that I’m not going to be very interested in it.” She preferred a mix; she liked to read some and have resources in which she could find things if she needed them.

_Leahanne Merritt_

Ms. Merritt had been teaching for thirty-one years at the time of this study. She earned her master’s degree several years earlier. She was part of the original staff when her current school opened thirteen years ago; however, she had been teaching elementary gifted students for a total of sixteen years. Ms. Merritt’s teaching responsibilities included math, language arts, social studies, and science. As an expert teacher, she enjoyed “always being up on the latest” and used professional learning opportunities to maintain her teaching certificate and professional enthusiasm.

Ms. Merritt needed to know ahead of time what the content of professional learning would be and benefited from having the freedom to choose the topics that she had personal interest in learning about. She saw great value in professional learning that was presented by expert teachers who actually used the focus of the session in their classrooms daily:

We had sessions with them and they talked about and demonstrated how they presented the topic in their own classroom. We also had a workshop in progress for elementary school students while our class was going on. We got to be a fly on the wall watching expert teachers, published authors, children’s authors, and that just made it all the more meaningful, too. I couldn’t wait to get started using it in my classroom. I wasn’t alone; I mean the place was on fire.
She felt that experts could successfully lecture because their style included performance and passion, not just talk. Because they demonstrated their content, the experts connected with every audience. She also doubted that someone who just stood up and lectured was truly well prepared. A presenter had to be more than just smart; a presenter had to demonstrate credibility rooted in experience and feeling: “It’s got to be something that you have done yourself and believe in.” Another reason Ms. Merritt wanted experts to teach her professional learning was to see or hear about the successes that they experienced in their classrooms and how excited they were about the topic. Also, they often provided resources that further explained what they were talking about, described how to get started, or listed publications or websites that provided more in-depth information or where to get help. Sharing classroom experiences was another reason Ms. Merritt enjoyed peer observation. She liked being able to go in and observe her colleagues teaching things that they were especially proficient in. She said it was a “great thing” to be able to learn from one another. Collegial interaction was another reason Ms. Merritt thought that mentoring was an effective design for professional learning. She stated that mentors and mentees had all expressed how they had learned from one another: “The mentors are learning things from these young, enthusiastic teachers and then vice versa. So I think that’s a very valuable experience.” She also appreciated idea swaps. She recalled how in the past all the teachers of the gifted students in her county assembled once a month to exchange ideas about what they were doing in their classrooms. She felt this interaction was very helpful, especially when she was new. At the time of the study, she valued those interactions because the new teachers shared all the new ideas with her. She regretted that her county had grown too big to be able to meet
in this way anymore: “You need to learn from each other and hear from each other; ‘Hey, I’m doing this in my classroom, and it’s really working.’” Ms. Merritt looked forward to another form of idea swapping that she had observed at conferences, specifically the national math conference (NTCM). She felt conferences offered excitement and exchange of ideas from other teachers throughout her state or nation. She was particular about what sessions she chose to attend, avoiding those conducted by people of questionable credentials. She also needed the freedom to get up and leave a session if it was lecture-based or laden with pointless activities. Ms. Merritt said the worst kind of professional learning was a straight lecture. She also disliked “doing these cutesy little activities that you really didn’t need to do.” She believed that every teacher came back home fired up, ready to use the ideas they learned at a conference. Ms. Merritt thought attendees should share with the local school staff what they had taken away from a conference because anyone interested could benefit from the experience of one person.

Ms. Merritt compared her learning design needs to those of her students. She did not enjoy simply having a professor stand up in front of a classroom and lecture:

[Teachers] like to see. We like to hear. We like to do. And when you can use as many senses as possible to learn something, then you internalize. And I think that if we provide instruction for our students the way [the expert practitioners] provided it for us, the school day should just fly by.

She said that learning something new in technology was a perfect example of the kind of learning design she enjoyed because learning was accomplished by doing.

Ms. Merritt strongly believed that professional learning should be an effective use of her time. She considered learning that could be immediately used in her classroom the
most valuable. Although Ms. Merritt was no longer a regular classroom teacher, she empathized with elementary school teachers who never had enough time “to plan, to get their classroom ready in the morning. . . . If we do professional learning, we want it to be meaningful and something that we get excited about.” According to Ms. Merritt, another strategy for using time effectively was to conduct professional learning in “big chunks of time rather than a forty-five minute period in the morning.” She felt that by the time everyone got organized and started, the professional learning ended up being no more than half an hour. In her opinion, a larger amount of time provided the opportunity to look deeper into new material instead of skimming over a new technique. She did, however, recognize that some technology topics could effectively be covered in forty-five minutes and still include time for practice.

Ms. Merritt identified some required professional learning as less valuable for two reasons. One reason was that the required topic often simply reformatted an existing technique:

It’s already really, really good and just reformatting it takes a lot of time. They’re going to have us rewrite units according to the new model. They’re trying to get us to rewrite what we’ve already done all along anyway.

The second reason Ms. Merritt disliked required professional learning was that implementing new content during a formal observation became a condition for receiving a good performance evaluation.

John Angelo

John Angelo had been teaching for nineteen years at the time of this study. During this time, he earned his master’s degree. For all of his nineteen years, he had been a high
school theatre teacher. His last three years had been spent at his current location. Mr. Angelo participated in professional learning to contribute to the profession, especially in his content area.

Mr. Angelo needed professional learning experiences that pushed him outside of his comfort zone. He described a book study for which he chose his title from predetermined selections. Everyone who chose that title participated in a dialogue about it. He felt this experience validated him as a professional:

A lot of teachers went kicking and screaming, but I said “Guys, we’re professionals; we should be reading up on what’s happening in education, in communication with parents. We expect our kids to do it, and we expect other professionals—lawyers and doctors are constantly reading.”

He also felt professional learning that kept a spark in his teaching was important. One of the best ways to get “his juices flowing” was to have professional learning delivered by teachers from outside of his home county. Even so, it was necessary that they understood how his county worked and had enough information about his school to make the content relevant. In fact, the best scenario was when the content was tailored specifically for his school. He also appreciated having professional learning delivered by peers from his own county. They validated his struggles in the trenches and could share perspectives from different schools. He said these folks helped him remember that his professional challenges were often similar to those in other areas of the county. He also needed to obtain new information about what was “out there” to help his students learn. He felt that unless he was working on a formal degree, he tended to get entrenched in the daily
business of teaching and neglected the career-long business of professional learning.

Another way Mr. Angelo kept a spark in his teaching was through mentoring:

It’s neat working with these brand new teachers that are just, you know, lots of energy and feel they can change the world. And that just motivates me. As much as I help them, they help me so much with giving me that spark and learning some of the new techniques and trends that they may have just got from college. I think we help each other a lot.

Mr. Angelo thought the most practical professional learning for him was collaboration in the form of sharing ideas and answering each other’s questions. He felt that this sort of dialogue was the most successful for him because it provided him a chance to stop and think, helping him create his own professional learning:

It wasn’t just some speaker coming in talking to us, but we were able to—“this is what’s happening in our county. This is what’s happening in our area. What are some suggestions of things that are working or some problems that some of us might have across the county?” Brainstorm some of those ideas, how we can fix some of those problems.

In conjunction with this professional dialogue, Mr. Angelo said the perfect professional learning for him involved hands-on activities. He valued being an active participant in his learning: “There is so much good information; it’s just coming up with different ways to present that.” He recalled mandatory professional learning when all he did was listen. He looked around the room, and teachers had their plan books out. They were grading papers and not really actively listening to what was being said. Neither he nor the other teachers were engaged. He liked professional learning that involved a little talking followed by
actual implementation, perhaps even a mock lesson. He valued breaking out into groups and moving around. As a high school theatre teacher, he recognized his isolation and felt that group work provided an opportunity to meet other people.

In addition to hands-on learning, Mr. Angelo enjoyed the freedom to choose his topics for professional development. During a designated professional development day, he wanted to attend two or three sessions of his choice, rather than be told what to attend:

Sometimes it was the same type of topic that had just been said over and over again, like this teen suicide that the counselors did at the beginning of the school year. After five or six years, it was the same, and it wasn’t fair to the new teachers that really needed to hear it because they were getting such negative vibes. “Oh, here we go again.”

He felt that being forced to attend these repetitive sessions was a disservice to more experienced teachers who had probably already heard about the topic, even though new teachers needed the information.

Mr. Angelo said he was a visual person. He enjoyed a simple PowerPoint that supplemented content. He did not approve of someone reading the PowerPoint to him; in fact, the presenter did not even have to be there. He did appreciate the other dimension to the topic that the visual or audio element added. He also thought that music was effective for setting mood and changing the atmosphere, especially when people would rather not have been attending a professional learning session.

Although not his favorite delivery model, Mr. Angelo did recognize that lecture was appropriate when learning about a brand new topic. According to Mr. Angelo, brand new teachers needed a lot of the procedural and technological information that could be
Mr. Angelo felt that timing could make or break professional learning. He became frustrated when professional learning, even on a topic he had chosen, was scheduled after hours during a busy time of the school year, such as progress report time. Consequently, he wanted to see professional learning take place during the workday. He believed that if the time and place were communicated effectively, scheduling his time for attending professional learning would not be difficult. Because he taught on a block schedule, he could participate in professional learning during his planning period, which was 93 minutes long. He also felt it would be beneficial for professional learning to replace faculty meetings. Another reason he wanted professional learning to take place during the workday was to avoid its being “crammed in when teachers get back at the beginning of the school year,” when they needed that time to prepare for the first day of school. He felt the best option for him was to participate in summer professional learning because he had no other obligations during that time and could focus. He could also devote longer periods of time to participating in workshops or attending conferences or visiting other schools.

Marie Burt

Ms. Burt had been teaching for twenty-four years at the time of this study. Eighteen of those years had been at her current school. Although originally a teacher of science, for the last eight years, she had been teaching theatre arts to grades six, seven,
and eight. Having completed her specialist degree, Ms. Burt participated in professional learning to acquire more knowledge and skills in the technical area of theatre.

Ms. Burt felt that having the freedom to choose professional learning experiences was her most fundamental professional need for two reasons. First, she attended professional learning to extend her knowledge or find new ways to approach something she taught to her students:

I want to feel like I’m ahead of the curve. If there are new trends in education, I want to be on top of them as much as a college student would be. I want something that’s going to keep me up to date. I’m not really sure that there’s anything new under the sun, but there’s always new terminology and new ways of dealing with things, and so it helps if everyone’s on the same page.

Ms. Burt also stated that she felt professional learning helped her stay current with today’s students. She believed that meeting the needs of students was more and more difficult because more and more was expected of her. For professional learning to be worth her time, she needed to learn something. Choosing the sessions she attended usually guaranteed that she would learn. Second, Ms. Burt believed that when teachers chose their professional learning, they were more likely to take it seriously:

Choice is important because, otherwise, they’ll resent having to go to something they don’t think they need, especially if they don’t really need it and the school’s just sending someone because they’re supposed to send two people. I don’t want to be in a class with people who just signed up for it so they’ll get a stipend.

Ms. Burt liked to pick the brain or access the expertise of the leader who was teaching the professional learning. She explained that the leader had something to offer,
and she wanted to know what it was. That leader could facilitate self-teaching, but she needed to be able to ask questions of the leader and have them answered: “I want to understand how what they’re talking about applies in my classroom.”

Ms. Burt felt that professional learning needed to focus on a goal that she could actually pursue, that she found useful, and that had follow-up. It needed to benefit her and not the presenter. She compared ideal professional learning to what she witnessed during summer employment in the business world. When a business reviewed an employee, the employee’s gaps were identified, and training was provided in that area to strengthen the employee: “Those were the classes you would take.” In a sense, they had developed learning plans.

Ms. Burt especially liked professional learning that provided the opportunity to run through activities exactly the way a student would experience them: “Then you can get an idea of how the kid would feel in it. You also got an idea of how to conduct the activity.” She saw benefits to having expert teachers provide these demonstrations because the participants often found useful management techniques in addition to the intended content. She enjoyed professional learning that presented new lessons or new activities because she did not want to feel stagnant.

Ms. Burt recalled that when she taught science, she appreciated going on field trips that involved practical applications of her content. One example was a visit to a water plant when teaching about water conservation or the water cycle. She felt this trip made her teaching relevant to her students.

Ms. Burt was specific about poor professional learning experiences. She saw little benefit in attending professional learning that addressed large groups in large venues. As
an individual who thrived on active learning, she felt that listening to a speaker created an awareness of ideas but did not teach her anything useful. She also disliked it when everybody in the class was doing the teaching. For this reason, she did not like to work in groups. She knew that she was going to work hard and could not be sure that everyone else would. She also believed that less material was covered when group work was the main delivery model employed by the instructor. Ms. Burt resented having to sit through sessions delivered by a visiting consultant:

I don’t like it when some consultant who is going around the country making a thousand dollars, two thousand dollars a pop at a meeting, is brought in. Everybody has to go to it, and you’re sitting there the whole time knowing that this is just a new trend that’s not going to stay around, and this consultant is making a lot of money. I feel like that money could be put to better use, unless it was for something we were going to actually do.

She felt those sessions served to glorify the presenter rather than to strengthen the teacher. Ms. Robinson clearly valued challenging sessions that extended her content knowledge and activity repertoire that met her needs.

**Beth Wagner**

Ms. Wagner had been teaching for sixteen years at the time of this study. She had been teaching gifted fourth and fifth graders for the last five years, and she had helped open her current school in 2003. Because she he had just finished her master’s degree the previous year, Ms. Wagner did not participate in professional learning for credits toward renewal of her teaching certificate. She participated because she loved to learn.
Ms. Wagner felt that a beneficial professional learning experience would supply her with information she did not already have: “I have to be challenged; I have to be learning new things.” She likened an accurate course description to a pretest that determined what people did and did not know. Ms. Wagner believed that just as teachers individualize for their students based on a pretest, professional learning instructors could individualize for their participants by providing an accurate course description. Then teachers could register for classes that filled in their knowledge gaps or appealed to their interests: “If you’re interested in taking it, you should be able to take it.” She expressed her frustration with graduate school. Instead of taking a class that, in reality, she could have taught, she would rather have taken a higher-level class and learned something new. Ms. Wagner felt that her frustration could have been eliminated by a broader set of choices and that this freedom could also enhance professional learning. She felt that professional learning choices in her county were limited by content and grade level. While she agreed that, for instance, high school-level classes were intended for high school teachers, she also believed that teachers of any grade level profited by broadening their content knowledge. As an experienced teacher, she felt the multitude of methods courses offered for professional learning no longer served her professional needs:

If I’m having to sit through something that I already know or a three-day training that could be condensed into, you know, maybe two hours, it’s a waste of my time. . . . Now a lot of the new teachers came out and really had not taught that way or learned that way, and so for them it was very beneficial. At her career stage, she primarily needed new information. This fact was confirmed when an instructor told her, “this was not as applicable to you, but it is to most people.”
Ms. Wagner also placed high value on instructor credibility. One type of credibility came in the form of research. Ms. Wagner had asked one particular presenter about a statement she made in class and was told to email her. When Ms. Wagner emailed the instructor and asked for the supporting research, she never received a response:

And to me, if you’re questioning the basis for the whole program, first of all, and you can’t get an answer, that’s a red flag. If you don’t have research that backs it up, if you don’t have a strong foundation, the whole building crumbles. If they’re not answering my questions, I’m not trusting them at all.

Ms. Wagner often chose to participate in seminars at regional and national conferences. She enjoyed interacting with researchers who offered seminars in their fields of study. One of the reasons that Ms. Wagner enjoyed attending conferences was that she was in a community or in a setting for several days where everyone was focused on the same thing. Everyone wanted to attend, to improve, and to learn. She also enjoyed listening to highly educated keynote speakers: “I never walk away feeling like it was a waste of my time.” Ms. Wagner also appreciated the networking that a conference provided. Not only did she learn new things, but she also met new people.

Ms. Wagner mentioned what she thought of as less important factors when evaluating professional learning. For instance, she enjoyed interactive professional learning that often included hands-on activities. However, Ms. Wagner needed to be engaged, but not necessarily physically stimulated. Convenience was also a consideration. Ms. Wagner believed that successful professional learning was partially based on an emotional investment by the participant.
Common Themes and Categories

Three major themes and nine meta-categories emerged from data analysis to explicate the participants’ perspectives of career-stage appropriate professional learning. According to the participants in this study, career-stage appropriate professional learning is built on a three-pronged foundation composed of appropriate content, appropriate presenter, and appropriate delivery model. Participants in each represented career stage (apprentice, professional, and expert) also identified components and examples of each prong. For the purpose of this study, appropriate content referred to topics that met the teachers’ needs when participating in professional learning; appropriate presenter referred to demonstrated attributes of the presenter that met the teachers’ needs when participating in professional learning; appropriate delivery model referred to the format or design of the delivery model that teachers needed when participating in professional learning. In the following sections of this chapter, each theme related to the participants’ perspectives of career-stage appropriate professional learning programs is discussed. Excerpts from the participant interview transcripts are used to support the findings and to illuminate the participants’ perspectives. Table 4.2 provides an organized view of the themes and categories discussed by the participants. As shown, each theme serves as an umbrella for its related meta-categories, categories, and sub-categories, when identified.

Theme 1: Apprentice Teachers’ Perspectives of Career-Stage Appropriate Professional Learning Programs

This broad conceptual theme captures the apprentice teachers’ perspectives of appropriate professional learning programs. Three of the twelve participants in this study were apprentice teachers. As the findings reveal, all three of the apprentice teachers
Table 4.2

Themes, Meta-Categories, Categories, Sub-Categories, and Dimensions Related to Teachers’ Perspectives of Career-Stage Appropriateness of Professional Learning

**Theme 1: Apprentice Teachers’ Perspectives of Appropriate Professional Learning**

**Meta-category 1: Identifying Appropriate Content for Apprentice Teachers**

- **Category 1: Presenting immediately applicable information**
  - Sub-category 1: Presenting classroom management strategies
  - Sub-category 2: Providing technology training
  - Sub-category 3: Presenting local school procedures

- **Category 2: Presenting alternative teaching strategies**

- **Category 3: Providing printed resources**

**Meta-category 2: Identifying Appropriate Presenter for Apprentice Teachers**

- **Category 1: Demonstrating credibility**
  - Sub-category 1: Having current classroom experience
  - Sub-category 2: Having recent classroom experience

- **Category 2: Demonstrating Approachability**
  - Sub-category 1: Using a conversational tone
  - Sub-category 2: Being a peer

**Meta-category 3: Identifying Appropriate Delivery Model for Apprentice Teachers**

- **Category 1: Including participation**
  - Sub-category 1: Using collaboration
    - Dimension 1: Discussing content
    - Dimension 2: Posing questions and answers
    - Dimension 3: Sharing in groups
  - Sub-category 2: Using hands-on activities

- **Category 2: Attending professional conferences**

**Theme 2: Professional Teachers’ Perspectives of Appropriate Professional Learning**

**Meta-category 4: Identifying Appropriate Content for Professional Teachers**

- **Category 1: Providing choice**

- **Category 2: Presenting alternative teaching strategies**

- **Category 3: Presenting anecdotal information**

**Meta-category 5: Identifying Appropriate Presenter for Professional Teachers**

**Meta-category 6: Identifying Appropriate Delivery Model for Professional Teachers**

- **Category 1: Including participation**
  - Sub-category 1: Using collaboration
  - Sub-category 2: Sharing in groups
  - Sub-category 3: Using hands-on activities

- **Category 2: Including observation**

- **Category 3: Attending professional conferences**
expressed the following meta-categories in their interviews for this study: appropriate content, appropriate presenter, and appropriate delivery model. These meta-categories aligned with Theme 1 as recognized by the researcher during the coding process. This theme corresponds to the central research question that guided this study: “what are teachers’ perspectives of the career-stage appropriateness of their formal professional learning programs?” More specifically, the intent was to discover teachers’ beliefs about and attitudes toward the effectiveness of professional learning activities (i.e., whether professional learning activities met teachers’ needs). Table 4.3 summarizes the categories that emerged from the interviews with the apprentice teachers who participated in this study.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meta-Category</th>
<th>Classification</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate Content</td>
<td>Category 1: Presenting immediately applicable information</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Sub-category 1: Presenting classroom management strategies</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Sub-category 2: Providing technology training</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sub-category 3: Presenting local school procedures</td>
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<td>Category 2: Presenting alternative teaching strategies</td>
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<td>Category 3: Providing printed resources</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Category 2: Attending professional conferences</td>
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**Theme 2: Professional Teachers’ Perspectives of**

**Career-stage Appropriate Professional Learning Programs**

This broad conceptual theme captures the professional teachers’ perspectives of appropriate professional learning programs. The professional teachers comprised three of the twelve participants in this study. As the findings reveal, all three of the professional teachers expressed the following meta-categories in their interviews for this study: appropriate content, appropriate presenter, and appropriate delivery model. These meta-
categories aligned with Theme 2 as recognized by the researcher during the coding process. This theme corresponds to the central research question that guided this study: “what are teachers’ perspectives of the career-stage appropriateness of their formal professional learning programs?” More specifically, the intent was to discover teachers’ beliefs about and attitudes toward the effectiveness of professional learning activities (i.e., whether professional learning activities met teachers’ needs). Table 4.4 summarizes the categories that emerged from the interviews with the professional teachers who participated in this study.

Table 4.4

Professional Teachers’ Perspectives of Appropriate Professional Learning

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
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<td>Sub-category 1: Using collaboration</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-category 2: Sharing in groups</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-category 3: Using hands-on activities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 2: Including observation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Category 3: Attending professional conferences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theme 3: Expert Teachers’ Perspectives of Career-stage Appropriate Professional Learning Programs

This broad conceptual theme captures the expert teachers’ perspectives of appropriate professional learning programs. The expert teachers comprised six of the twelve participants in this study. As the findings reveal, all six of the expert teachers
expressed the following meta-categories in their interviews for this study: appropriate content, appropriate presenter, and appropriate delivery model. These meta-categories aligned with Theme 3 as recognized by the researcher during the coding process. This theme corresponds to the central research question that guided this study: “what are teachers’ perspectives of the career-stage appropriateness of their formal professional learning programs?” The intent was to discover teachers’ beliefs about and attitudes toward the effectiveness of professional learning activities (i.e., whether professional learning activities met teachers’ needs). Table 4.5 summarizes the categories that emerged from the interviews with the expert teachers who participated in this study. In the sections below, each meta-category is discussed individually by career stage. This organization will facilitate comparison and contrast of career-stage perspectives of appropriate professional learning.

Table 4.5

Expert Teachers’ Perspectives of Appropriate Professional Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meta-Category</th>
<th>Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate Content</td>
<td>Category 1: Presenting research-based topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 2: Providing choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 3: Presenting alternative teaching strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate Presenter</td>
<td>Category 1: Demonstrating credibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-category 1: Having personal classroom experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-category 2: Authoring the initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 2: Demonstrating passion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appropriate Delivery Model</td>
<td>Category 1: Including participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-category 1: Using collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-category 2: Using hands-on activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 2: Including observation</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


**Appropriate Content**

This section reports findings related to the meta-category *Appropriate Content*.

Table 4.6 summarizes these findings for each career stage.

Table 4.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career Stage</th>
<th>Classification</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apprentice</td>
<td>Category 1: Presenting immediately applicable information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-category 1: Presenting classroom management strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-category 2: Providing technology training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-category 3: Presenting local school procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 2: Presenting alternative teaching strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 3: Providing printed resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>Category 1: Providing choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 2: Presenting alternative teaching strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 3: Presenting anecdotal information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>Category 1: Presenting research-based topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 2: Providing choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 3: Presenting alternative teaching strategies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Identifying Appropriate Content for Apprentice Teachers*

With respect to identifying appropriate content, all three of the apprentice teachers expressed specific ideas about the content that they felt they needed from professional learning. For the purpose of this study, appropriate content referred to topics that met the teachers’ needs when participating in professional learning. Through analysis of their transcripts, three types of content emerged: immediately applicable information, alternative teaching strategies, and printed resources (see Table 4.7). Ms. Miller identified two areas: “There are two different kinds of things that I’m looking for: one
Apprentice Teachers’ Perspectives of Appropriate Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 1: Presenting immediately applicable information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-category 1: Presenting classroom management strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-category 2: Providing technology training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-category 3: Presenting local school procedures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Category 2: Presenting alternative teaching strategies |
| Category 3: Providing printed resources |

Table 4.7

that we don’t really get a lot of, just procedures . . . and probably, as with most teachers, classroom management.” Ms. Papa looked for content that was “useful in its entirety in relation to the classroom or to production value.” Mr. Joseph needed content to help him “catch up on all the other areas that you have not focused on as much, my weaker points like costuming or lighting, so that I can gather those resources to do better in those areas.”

*Category 1: Presenting immediately applicable information.*

All the apprentice teachers interviewed felt they needed relevant content. All the apprentice teachers required their professional learning to address topics that were immediately useful. According to Ms. Miller, a relevant topic focused on a “pressing need.” Ms. Papa expressed a similar opinion. She wanted learning that she could “take directly back to my classroom and implement.” Mr. Joseph participated in professional learning that provided “specific training” when he needed it.

*Sub-category 1: Presenting classroom management strategies.*

For two of the three apprentice teachers interviewed, one such crucial topic was classroom management strategies. Sheila Miller had less than a year of on-the-job experience because her position had been created in response to an unexpected growth in...
student population. As a result, she found herself responsible for lower-level, unmotivated students who tested her classroom management skills. She said she needed “something else to try when you have a difficult class” and was looking for “how to do something differently.” Ms. Miller also knew she needed to better use her class time:

I’d like to know how to make—how to use more of my class time, how to better manage my class time. I sometimes feel like I have too much time at the end where my lesson goes too fast and [the students] have so much time. Maybe there are some ways I could manage their time better. Maybe there’s something that I could be doing to get them to follow along with what I’m wanting them to do.

Everyday was a struggle for her as she groped for strategies to improve her interaction with students. Ms. Papa also sought content that increased her success in classroom management. She expressed frustration about not knowing how to assign detention until the third month of school: “It took over a semester to find out what a ‘red pass’ meant.” She referred to these tidbits as the “how-tos” of teaching that veteran teachers assumed newer teachers already knew and neglected to discuss. Although she respected the value of philosophical content, she said, “I don’t need to be philosophical at the earliest part of my career.” Mr. Joseph did not refer to increasing classroom management skills as a pressing need. Although he was a new classroom teacher, he had previously worked as a paraprofessional in the building. This familiarity with the students and the teaching environment equipped him with insight into classroom management issues.

Sub-category 2: Providing technology training.

All apprentice teachers interviewed felt they needed professional learning content at their career stage that included providing technology training. Ms. Miller, a teacher of
high school math, participated in learning that taught her how to use the Smart Board. Regretting that she did not have that skill earlier in the year, she recognized that using this particular technology “was something that would have been really beneficial.” As a result, she felt it would “actually help her in the classroom” and intended to incorporate the Smart Board into her teaching. Ms. Papa realized the importance of providing students with varied classroom experiences and considered incorporating technology into her teaching a way to achieve this variety. She likened her students to herself and reflected that she was much more attentive in class when “you’re not just staring at one person.” She found it valuable not only when technology was used in her learning but also when she was taught how to use it in her teaching. Mr. Joseph was looking for “specific training to help me work through things when I need them.” He recalled from his experience in the business world that training was often offered as he needed it. He felt that just-in-time training when in the midst of a struggle, especially in the area of technology, provided immediate reinforcement that prevented him from “never having to do that again.”

*Sub-category 3: Presenting local school procedures.*

Two of the three apprentice teachers interviewed expressed a need to learn local school procedures. Because Ms. Miller started teaching after the school year had already begun, she felt overloaded with new information: “I need to make sure I’m doing my job right, to make sure I’m following all the rules that I’m supposed to follow.” To do so required knowledge of fundamental school processes:

We do have these meetings called “new crew meetings,” and we get some of it, just procedures. I want to know if it would just be specifically for your county and
your school. You know, how do you handle this situation? What do you do about
tardies? It’s good information, information I’m glad to have and need and want.
Ms. Miller indicated that she felt inadequately prepared because she had previously
worked as a paraprofessional in an elementary school media center. Similarly, Ms. Papa
felt that she needed her school to provide “broad spectrum” information similar to what
she experienced at her county’s induction for new teachers. She thought it would be
“great for general information,” the type of “base knowledge” that she knew was useful,
only containing those items that dealt with the local school.

Category 2: Presenting alternative teaching strategies.

All three of the apprentice teachers interviewed believed they needed career-stage
appropriate professional learning content to include alternative teaching strategies. Ms.
Miller appreciated hearing about the experiences of other participants in professional
learning classes. She was encouraged because in an effort to find a technique that
worked, she felt that out of all the “experiences and ideas, maybe one’s going to match up
with something you have and give you an idea that you could try.” She felt this type of
exchange was more beneficial than just being given information in a handout or lecture.
Ms. Miller valued that type of content because it “gives you so much to think about.” In a
sense, she felt “support from one another.” Ms. Papa was interested in adding strategies
to her tool kit. Because Ms. Papa had experience with theatre in college, she appreciated
hearing about “different approaches to familiar material.” Ms. Papa was most interested
in finding different activities to do with her students: “Even though most of them were
things obviously we already knew, there were approaches that were different, which was
good.” She enjoyed being able to say, “You know what? I can see how that would really
work. I could modify and change it.” Ms. Papa was looking for options and valued suggestions for alternative approaches: “Well, if you need to do this, here’s an option.” Mr. Joseph intentionally signed up for topics that included alternative teaching strategies. He enjoyed professional learning that provided him with other methods that he approved of, such as
different approaches to the same topic, different approaches to the same activity.
Other people have methods that I like, and they give me ways to improve on what I’m doing. I’ve got another direction to go in, another path up that same mountain.

Mr. Joseph knew the importance of “keeping the kids’ attention” and valued the pedagogical variety he could develop through professional learning.

Category 3: Providing printed resources.

Two of the three apprentice teachers felt that appropriate professional learning at their career stage should provide access to printed resources. Ms. Miller and Mr. Joseph needed printed materials for two reasons. Ms. Miller wanted information written down in a handbook format: “I don’t have to remember so much. After I look it over, I still have a chance to ask questions about it, clarify, or ask about a specific situation.” Mr. Joseph mostly wanted lists of web sites or titles of professional publications. He also saw value in handouts of information. Although his first reaction was sometimes, “Oh great, something new I’ve got to figure out how to work into my lesson plans,” he confessed, “then I go back to my corner and go through some things and I might find something.” He enjoyed these resources because they provided him with means to extend his knowledge on his own time.
With respect to *identifying appropriate content*, all three of the apprentice teachers had specific ideas about the content that they needed from professional learning. Their interviews characterized appropriate content as immediately applicable information that was necessary for daily functioning, such as classroom management strategies, technology training, or local school procedures.

**Identifying Appropriate Content for Professional Teachers**

With respect to *identifying appropriate content*, all three of the professional teachers interviewed had specific thoughts about the professional learning content that they needed at their career stage. Furthermore, the *same* three types of content emerged from the three professional teacher interview transcripts: choice of topics, alternative teaching strategies, and anecdotal information (see Table 4.8). For the purpose of this study, *appropriate content* referred to topics that met the teachers’ needs when participating in professional learning.

**Table 4.8**

Professional Teachers’ Perspectives of Appropriate Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 1: Providing choice</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category 2: Presenting alternative teaching strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Category 3: Presenting anecdotal information</td>
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</table>

*Category 1: Providing choice.*

All three of the professional teachers interviewed felt they needed a choice of topics when participating in professional learning. All the professional teachers who participated in this study required topics that they had *chosen* to learn about, not topics that they were *required* to learn about. Ms. Pringle felt that she needed the leverage to
choose which professional learning classes she attended. She appreciated the professional learning specialist at her school because he “set up a new cafeteria plan”:

You get a list at the beginning of the year of all the different options for professional development, and I thought that was a great idea. You get to see what you’re interested in or what applies to you. . . . Something that you’ve already taken before, you don’t have to repeat.

In addition to avoiding the repetition that sometimes accompanied required professional learning, Ms. Pringle liked having options because there were “certain things that I really struggle with. I worry about whether I’m doing enough writing in my classroom, and, so if I could go to some kind of writing workshop—.” Another way to focus her professional learning was to participate in peer coaching. Her favorite aspect of peer coaching was “having the opportunity to say, ‘okay, this is what I want you to look for.’” She believed that, in a sense, she was determining the content of her learning. Ms. Pringle needed control of what professional learning classes she took. Ms. Robins also wanted the freedom to choose her professional learning: “I really do try and pick my classes.”

Because she was selective in what classes she attended, she believed that she deserved to get what she signed up for: “If I sign up for this course, I’m going to go and I’m going to take this, and I’m hopefully going to learn some great material about whatever topic that I’m interested in learning about. I want to get what I signed up to get.” Mr. Clements felt his eighteen years of experience earned him the autonomy to choose what professional learning he participated in: “After 18 years, I pick and choose what PLUs I go to.”
Category 2: Presenting alternative teaching strategies.

All three of the professional teachers interviewed believed that exposure to alternative teaching strategies was a required element of professional learning. Considering themselves to be busy, the professional teachers felt that attending repetitive professional learning sessions was unfulfilling. The participants wanted to learn new information and incorporate new skills that could be used as soon as they returned to their classrooms. The participants were willing to adapt new learning to accommodate their students’ needs, but the participants also looked for material that could be used exactly as they received it. Ms. Pringle was enthusiastic when presenters gave her “stuff that I can use . . . huge packets of stuff that I could replicate and use in my own classroom.” Ms. Pringle wanted to increase her available resources and became frustrated when she attended meetings that provided old information. Ms. Pringle pointed out that in one particular required meeting, she felt, “well, you know, I need to do this, this, this, this, this, and this is a waste of time.” She said that there were “a million other things I could have been doing.” Specifically, she referred to technology:

We go to these technology meetings, and I know there are some teachers that don’t know technology. I feel pretty well versed in most of it. And so to go to these meetings . . . like three of these meetings this year on the same website. The first time was very informative. The second and third time, it was like “Why am I here?”

Ms. Pringle needed to learn new material when she attended professional learning. Like Ms. Pringle, Ms. Robins clearly articulated her needs. She also needed new information, but in the form of new ways to teach familiar topics:
There is no need to reinvent the wheel in teaching. There are some fabulous, phenomenal teachers out there, and why do I want to go and make new things up all the time when there are hundreds of people in this building that I can get stuff from. People have been doing this for a lot longer than I have, and there are a lot of great ideas out there.

Ms. Robins attended professional learning classes so that she could teach her students in various ways. Ms. Robins realized that “you can get great stuff to help your kids,” but if she did not implement new strategies right away, she probably would not use them at all:

I want to know how I’m going to be able to use this in my classroom because that’s the reason why I’m here. I want anything that I can take back and use immediately, . . . where you can take [it] back and use it in your classroom the next day. I feel that’s the most realistic for me. If I’m not using it right away, I probably won’t use it.

Ms. Robins knew exactly what she needed and why she needed it. Mr. Clements’s beliefs aligned with his colleagues. He wanted to apply what he learned “pretty much immediately.” He was not interested in data about other teaching situations because he did not “see that as being really applicable because every situation is different.” For this reason, he stayed away from lecture: “I don’t believe that there is a person, unless a comedian trying to entertain, who could talk for an hour that would be really useful.” Mr. Clements was not interested in the hypothetical. He wanted varied approaches to common issues. Consequently, he valued spending time with other teachers designing a unit of study. This situation caused him to “rethink stuff, . . . rethink what I do.” All the
professional teachers who participated in this study needed professional learning to provide knowledge and skills that they could immediately apply to their teaching.

*Category 3: Presenting anecdotal information.*

All three of the professional teachers identified hearing anecdotal information from colleagues as a career-stage appropriate element of professional learning content. Listening to these actual teaching experiences of others elicited ideas that they could apply in their own teaching. Ms. Pringle wanted anecdotal information from other teachers to describe how content was used, “how it helped them in their classrooms, rather than just sort of this theoretical ‘this is what this is supposed to do.’” She needed to hear the practical value of professional learning content. Rather than hear about a topic, she wanted candid, helpful tips that actual teaching events revealed. Ms. Pringle pinpointed classroom management:

> Nothing I learned in school prepared me at all for classroom management, and I don’t know if you can learn classroom management in a class . . . I think you can get hints, like helpful hints when you come across problems.

She recognized the importance of hearing what other teachers had discovered about various methods that they used. Ms. Robins valued “just talking with different people in different schools and different types of environments.” She wanted to hear what worked for them: “I want to know what other people do and how other people get their kids motivated and how other people help their kids learn.” Ms. Robins thought hearing others’ anecdotal information gave her valuable insight into students in her own classroom. Mr. Clements used anecdotal information as a basis of comparison: “In my mind, I may already have the answer to ‘how do I handle this?’ but it is very likely that
I’ll hear two other ways that somebody handles it.” All three of the professional teachers who participated in this study needed professional learning that contained anecdotal information.

Identifying Appropriate Content for Expert Teachers

With respect to identifying appropriate content, all the expert teachers interviewed had specific thoughts about the professional learning content that they needed at their career stage. Through analysis of their transcripts, three types of content emerged: researched-based topics, participant choice, and new methods (see Table 4.9). Ms. Hand, Ms. Smeal, Mr. Angelo, and Ms. Wagner needed the content of professional learning to be researched-based. The types of and reasons for researched-based content ranged from proof that an innovation worked to proof that the premise of the innovation was trustworthy. Four of the six expert teachers believed that they should choose their professional learning. Ms. Merritt appreciated choosing content from a menu of topics, from the “simplest” to the “more complicated,” especially in the area of technology. Mr. Angelo felt that choosing his topics for professional learning helped him avoid information “for the brand new teachers.” Ms. Burt needed to choose her topics for professional learning so she “wouldn’t resent having to go to something” that she did not feel she “really needed.” Ms. Wagner wanted to choose topics in which she was genuinely interested, not a class she had to take “because it was a requirement.” Finally, four of the six expert teachers felt that professional learning should provide new teaching methods. Ms. Smeal needed new activities to do with her students “to help her become a more effective teacher.” Ms. Merritt also believed that the purpose of professional learning was to provide teachers with “some practical techniques that they could use in
the classroom.” In addition, Mr. Angelo felt that new information was needed in a professional learning experience. He commented that working as a mentor was one way he gathered new methods. He felt that new teachers had “new information on what’s out there in terms of learning.” Ms. Burt had similar sentiments. She needed to learn “new ways to approach something.” For the purpose of this study, appropriate content referred to topics that met the teachers’ needs when participating in professional learning. The discussion of appropriate content concludes with the perspectives of expert teachers.

Table 4.9

Expert Teachers’ Perspectives of Appropriate Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 1: Presenting research-based topics</th>
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<tr>
<td>Category 2: Providing choice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Category 3: Presenting alternative teaching strategies</td>
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</table>

Category 1: Presenting research-based topics.

Four of the six expert teachers who participated in this study required research-based topics as an element of professional learning. These teachers were interested in ideas that went beyond theory, ideas that actually worked in their teaching environment.

As Ms. Hand said,

I hate to say it, but too many educational theories, I just tend to call them band-aides anyway, the people that come up with them, it’s a great idea, but once you get to the nitty gritty of it, it doesn’t work. So, actually, an idea that they had come up with that actually does work is what I like to see.

Ms. Hand wanted to know that the presenter had implemented the idea, had researched it, and had actually done it “in a school with 3,000 kids.” She needed to know that the innovation had previously and successfully been put into practice. She wanted a proven
theory. Ms. Merritt also looked for proof in the form of recorded classroom success. Ms. Merritt valued the proof provided by “expert teachers who used [the innovation] in their classrooms on a daily basis.” Ms. Smeal had similar sentiments, although she looked for documented studies. She wanted content to include “studies that showed that this [idea] had been successful, or verified, or gave me proof that this methodology or, you know, whatever it is I’m going to implement new in my classroom, that it works.” Mr. Angelo was also specifically interested in formal research:

I think that’s the thing that I need, what’s happening out there research-wise that they have found works with teaching kids. There are so many journals that are out there and by being able to have somebody come in and sort of share some of that stuff, I think is the most important for me.

Ms. Wagner was insistent about her need for research-based content: “There’s so much new research. I enjoy reading research journals. I was introduced to content in areas I didn’t even know were new fields of study.” Unlike the other expert teachers interviewed, her belief in the importance of research was not founded on a need for reassurance that her efforts to increase student achievement would be successful but on her need to trust the veracity of the assumptions that lead to initially developing the innovation. She looked for research that supported the basis of the content. She further related that research was the basis for the trust that she needed in the content of her professional learning:

If you don’t believe this program, if you can’t trust the research on which the entire program was founded, how can you trust the program? . . . It makes you tend to distrust the entire program because you can’t base an entire system on a
lie. You have to be really careful if you don’t have research that backs [the content] up.

As far as Ms. Wagner was concerned, a presenter had to back up professional learning content with documented research about the root of the topic. Ms. Merritt also looked for proof, but not in the form of formal studies. Ms. Merritt valued the proof provided by “expert teachers who used [the innovation] in their classrooms on a daily basis.” Whether based on formal studies or on daily practices, four of the six expert teachers interviewed needed their professional learning content to be founded upon verifiable research.

**Category 2: Providing choice.**

Four of the six expert teachers believed that having a choice of topics was an appropriate element of professional learning at their career stage. Ms. Merritt felt that her school did a “really good job of that” by designating “one day a week for professional learning,” and she appreciated being able to choose what classes she attended:

> It’s like a menu. You can pick and choose, depending upon what your experience is as a teacher. Of course, there is some professional learning that ends up being required that sometimes we feel is not all that valuable. Where I teach is just so filled with professionals. They all go above and beyond. I really don’t feel like our staff needs [required professional learning].

Ms. Merritt believed that expert teachers did not need the restriction or repetition that often accompanies mandatory professional learning. Another venue that offered Ms. Merritt the freedom to choose her professional learning was a conference:

> There’s a knack to choosing sessions. I like to look to see what [the presenter’s] credentials are before I choose [a session]. But you have to be careful. And you
know what? If you’re sitting in on a session that turns out not to be good, just get up and leave.

Ms. Merritt felt her time was too valuable to sit through a conference session that did not offer enough to meet her expectations. Mr. Angelo also valued having a “variety of topics to choose from.” He recognized that having the freedom to choose professional learning had a positive effect on his attitude:

It’s not everyone has to listen to this one speaker on this one topic. It’s just psychology, just having that choice saying, “Oh, I’ll be able to pick this, this, and this” instead of saying you’re told you have to go all sit through this one here.

Mr. Angelo felt that the “negative vibes” that emanated from required professional learning interfered with his learning. He wanted the freedom to choose his professional learning classes because he believed his teaching experience had equipped him with the ability to decide what he needed or did not need. Another reason Mr. Angelo wanted to choose his learning was that freedom of choice validated him as a professional. One such opportunity came from a whole-faculty book study:

One sticks in my mind; [one] jumps into my mind here where I think it was the best staff development I ever did. It was a book study group where all the teachers chose a book. We had to read a book. I know a lot of teachers went kicking and screaming, but I said, “guys, we’re professionals. We should be reading up on what’s happening in education, in communication with parents. You know, we expect our kids to do it, and we expect other professionals—doctors and lawyers are constantly reading.” I really felt like I was validated as a teacher and treated as a professional.
Mr. Angelo believed that being able to choose his professional learning was appropriate for his level of experience and professionalism. Ms. Burt also mentioned the negative effects of attending required professional learning. She wanted to attend professional learning classes “to learn something. If I take the time to go, I want to learn something from it.” Like Mr. Angelo, Ms. Burt resented “having to go to something that I don’t think I need, especially if the school’s just sending someone because they’re supposed to.” She felt that public education would be wise to follow a business model that she encountered while working in human resources during summer employment:

It was a pretty big business in Atlanta, a really sharp one. When reviews were done, [the managers] really seriously looked at what the teachers themselves needed, where their gaps were, and had some ways to fill in those gaps. The manager would in the yearly review look at what you can do in order to be a better employee for us.

In that culture of continuous improvement, she recognized that every manager was required to suggest appropriate new learning that reflected identified gaps in employee performance. There were two benefits of this approach: (a) accurate documentation mirrored an employee’s qualities, and (b) specific employee’s gaps were addressed through suggested professional learning. The employee could choose to follow through with training or risk becoming unemployed. Ms. Wagner also recognized that choosing her professional learning was important to her at her career stage. She felt it was unrealistic to expect individual professional learning topics to meet everyone’s needs:

You have teachers who are brand new teachers, and you also have teachers who have taught, you know, twenty or thirty years, and one class, just—I can’t believe
that one class could meet all their needs. If it’s a motivational speaker, that could
be true, but as far as content, that just doesn’t fit.

Ms. Wagner believed that generic professional learning was ineffective. She also stated
that teachers should be able to choose according to their interests: “I think when [the
county] offers classes, and people can sign up for those classes, that’s a great method
because people are allowed to choose their classes.” Ms. Wagner took this topic of choice
even further, contending that topics should be made available to teachers at multiple
grade levels. At the time of this interview, some professional learning opportunities in her
county were offered to teachers based on the grade level or subject they taught: “I would
change that system a little bit because I think it’s rather limiting. We put specific grade
requirements on classes.” She was resistant to sitting “through something that I already
know or a three-day training that could be condensed into, you know, maybe two hours.
It’s a waste of my time.” Ms. Wagner said that the opportunity to take a class that was ear
marked for another grade level would give the participant a chance to broaden the
understanding and implications of a subject area, as well as avoid wasting her time
through repetition. Ms. Wagner made reference to one specific class that she, as an
elementary school teacher, was interested in but restricted from taking: “I would much
rather have taken a higher level class and learned something new.” She believed that
“we’re much better teachers if we understand, have a much better and broader
understanding of all subject areas.”

Category 3: Presenting alternative teaching strategies.

Three of the six expert teachers believed that exposure to alternative teaching
strategies was an appropriate element of professional learning at their career stage. They
had developed their teaching skills to the point where they felt confident adding to their repertoire of methods. As Ms. Smeal said, “I’m looking for materials. You go to [staff development] to learn and bring home activities.” She felt that staff development was meant to provide activities for teachers to use in their classrooms to become more effective teachers. Ms. Smeal was interested in “things that you can do, take, and implement right away in your classroom.” She spoke of a specific math class she had taken where she knew that she would walk out, come back to her class, and be able to use the information, if not the next day, within a certain time period: “I was looking for some activities to really extend, some things that I can bring into my class and use. It’s something that we can take right into the classroom and implement immediately.” One reason Ms. Smeal looked for “better ways to teach things” was that her student population seemed to change every year:

    Some things just—they may have worked one year, but they don’t the next year. And so you have to teach to those kids with different learning styles. They just don’t get it the same way. Teach to kids, not the subject. Avoid boredom, and maintain your sanity.

Ms. Smeal was interested in making her teaching more exciting: “It’s like I can’t wait to go back and do this in my classroom.” Another reason she needed professional learning to provide her with new methods was to stave off student discipline issues. Although she did not have discipline issues, she admitted that some classes were approaching content the same old way. In one class in particular, “the kids are bored. They aren’t excited about school. And you wonder why they’re not trying. Just worksheet, worksheet, worksheet, and [my peer teacher] does have a lot of behavior issues.” Ms. Merritt also
needed new methods and referred to them as “wash and wear” content. She enjoyed finding these at the National Gifted Conference, where teachers were excited about the exchange of ideas. Every teacher came fired up, ready to use the ideas that they learned at a conference: “You can take it home and it’s like wash and wear. You can take it home and use it.” In addition to methods and activities provided at conferences, Ms. Merritt also gathered information that directed participants where to look for more resources or explained in more depth how a technique worked. She was not looking for reproducible “handouts to use in class. I have a whole file on those, and there are a lot of them that I’ve never even used. But if I’m interested in something, I want to be able to know where to read more about it.” Mr. Angelo needed up-to-date methods for teaching. He believed there were two sources for these methods; one was peers in different schools in his county. He saw little value in “just some speaker coming in talking to us.” He wanted to know what was happening in his county with respect to his content area: “What are some suggestions of things that are working or some problems that some of us might have across the county?” For Mr. Angelo, current information meant real time, as if the content were developing as knowledge was shared. The other source for up-to-date methods was professional reading, such as journals and research. He looked for something that’s going to keep me interested, keep that spark in my teaching. I go back to just trying to get new information on what’s out there that’s going to help the kids in terms of learning, using different techniques in the classroom. There are so many journals that are out there.

Three of the expert teachers who participated in this study believed that alternative teaching strategies were necessary elements of professional learning.
With respect to identifying appropriate content, all six of the expert teachers had specific ideas about the content that they needed from professional learning. Four of the six expert teachers characterized researched-based topics as appropriate content. From the perspectives of these teachers, researched-based topics referred to information that was proven successful either by classroom implementation or formal studies. Additionally, four of the six expert teachers needed to choose the topics of their professional learning. Their ability to choose topics ensured that the professional learning experience was not repetitive or a waste of their time. Finally, the expert teachers wanted their professional learning to provide new information. This new information came in different forms, including new activities to use with their own students, new ideas for addressing real-time issues, and new subject content. This expanded subject content could be restricted to their area of teaching or broadened to address teaching in general.

Appropriate Presenter

This section reports findings related to the meta-category Appropriate Presenter. Table 4.10 summarizes these findings for each career stage.

Identifying Appropriate Presenter for Apprentice Teachers

With respect to identifying appropriate presenter, all three of the apprentice teachers had specific ideas about the type of presenter they preferred in professional learning. For the purpose of this study, appropriate presenter referred to the demonstrated attributes of the presenter that met the teachers’ needs when participating in professional learning. Through analysis of their transcripts, data emerged in two categories: demonstrating credibility through experience and demonstrating approachability through collegial interaction (see Table 4.11). Apprentice teachers
Table 4.10

Appropriate Presenter from the Perspectives of Apprentice, Professional, and Expert Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career Stage</th>
<th>Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Apprentice   | Category 1: Demonstrating credibility  
|              |   Sub-category 1: Having current classroom experience  
|              |   Sub-category 2: Having recent classroom experience  
|              | Category 2: Demonstrating approachability  
|              |   Sub-category 1: Using a conversational tone  
|              |   Sub-category 2: Being a peer  
| Professional | Identifying Appropriate Presenter for Professional Teachers  
| Expert       | Category 1: Demonstrating credibility  
|              |   Sub-category 1: Having personal classroom experience  
|              |   Sub-category 2: Authoring the initiative  
|              | Category 2: Demonstrating passion  

Table 4.11

Apprentice Teachers’ Perspectives of Appropriate Presenter

| Category 1: Demonstrating credibility |  
| Sub-category 1: Having current classroom experience |  
| Sub-category 2: Having recent classroom experience |  
| Category 2: Demonstrating Approachability |  
| Sub-category 1: Using a conversational tone |  
| Sub-category 2: Being a peer |

wanted someone who had classroom teaching experience but, as Sheila Miller said, “not someone who had taught 20 years ago.” Although the presenter did not have to be currently teaching, the apprentice teachers wanted the presenters to have recent experience that provided them with insight into the culture of contemporary education. These teachers felt that their current classroom situations presented unique challenges that could best be handled with shared expertise from someone who was either currently
teaching or who had recently taught. Melissa Papa wanted someone who understood
current issues, current kids, and current schools. These presenters also had to be
approachable by creating a stress-free, open, and friendly environment. The apprentice
teachers’ interviews disclosed that a presenter was appropriate when he or she
demonstrated credibility by having current or recent classroom experience. A presenter
demonstrated approachability by engaging in stress-free collegial interaction with
professional learning participants.

*Category 1: Demonstrating credibility.*

All the apprentice teachers felt they needed a presenter who demonstrated
credibility. Ms. Miller wanted her instructor to have “a lot of really good information to
share.” She felt this quality was best found in someone

who’s either doing it now or just recently taught. You know, not someone that
taught twenty years ago. I feel like they would be out of touch with what’s going
on in my current classroom, the kinds of students I’m dealing with, because that
does change over time.

Ms. Miller wanted her presenter to be someone who was doing what she was doing or
who had recently done it. This professional did not have to have an abundance of
experience but needed to have recent experience with pertinent information. Ms. Papa
broadened this concept of credibility to include a presenter who was a practitioner in
professional theatre:

On the last day, we actually brought in a guy from Barbazon Lighting and talked
about lighting instruments and electricity and things that we didn’t necessarily all
know, like why everybody keeps popping fuses when they try and do a
performance in their cafeteria. Learning about those things just made it interesting.

Ms. Papa valued interaction with presenters who were practitioners, especially in the area of professional theatre. Mr. Joseph found credible presenters at conferences. He attended seminars where other high schools performed and were frequently critiqued by college level professionals who conducted the session:

The conference was terrific because I was watching other schools perform, and then you had your critics who were not always high school teachers but college-level professionals giving the feedback. Some of the things they would say I’d be going, “Okay, I felt good about that because I caught that, too.” But then other things they would say and I’d go, “Ah, okay, good point. I missed that one.”

Mr. Joseph believed this type of presenter was beneficial to him because he could measure himself against other teaching professionals.

Category 2: Demonstrating approachability.

Two of the three apprentice teachers felt they needed a presenter who demonstrated approachability. When she felt a presenter was approachable, Ms. Miller said that she would be much more relaxed:

When I heard something I needed to change in my classroom, I would sit there thinking, ‘Well, I’ll ask her about that later. I’m not really sure about that, but I’m not going to ask that now. I’ll ask it when class is over, when I don’t have to feel stupid.’

When the presenter demonstrated approachability, Ms. Miller felt like “the pressure is off.” Ms. Papa believed that when a presenter demonstrated approachability, she was
able to connect with that person: “I like to be able to build that relationship so I have a resource to call upon.” Ms. Papa enjoyed a presenter to whom she could relate “one on one” and with whom she felt free to “disagree on things as opposed to ‘my word is gospel because it works for me.’” For these ladies, a presenter who was approachable created a collegial relationship with professional learning participants that was appropriate for their career stage.

Identifying Appropriate Presenter for Professional Teachers

With respect to identifying appropriate presenter, all three of the professional teachers interviewed had specific thoughts about the presenter of professional learning that they needed at their career stage (see Table 4.12). For the purpose of this study, appropriate presenter referred to demonstrated attributes of the presenter that met the teachers’ needs when participating in professional learning. Professional teachers required presenters who knew what they were talking about, not thought they knew what they were talking about, and who had acquired this knowledge through experience. The transcripts of the professional teacher interviews revealed that these teachers needed a presenter with recent or current teaching experience.

Table 4.12

Professional Teachers’ Perspectives of Appropriate Presenter

Identifying Appropriate Presenter for Professional Teachers

All three of the professional teachers interviewed believed that having a presenter who had recently taught or who was currently teaching was beneficial to their professional learning. They found that these presenters had knowledge of contemporary
students that provided necessary insight into contemporary classrooms. Ms. Pringle felt that “other teachers presenting it would be good.” She looked for other teachers that are really on the same page as me. . . . Teachers that just have been in the classroom and are in the classroom now know the kinds of kids I’m working with, so they know the population that I’m dealing with. . . . Teachers that have recently been in the classroom have a good handle on what’s going on. Ms. Pringle needed a recent or current teacher who understood contemporary students to present her professional learning. Ms. Robins felt the same way:

The best staff developments that I’ve gone to have been by teachers. I don’t want the person who’s in the business world, you know, and says, “here’s this great program; use this.” I want somebody who’s doing it in their classroom right now, and I know it works because they’ve done it, and they’ve tried it, and they know what the kids say when you do this activity, and they can give you that kind of talk and tell you, “here’s what’s going to happen if you do this.” I’m not saying that it has to be tried and true before I’ll try something, but it’s really, really beneficial if you know how the kids are going to respond to it and you know that somebody’s already done it and it works.

Ms. Robins especially felt this way because she was in her first year of teaching fourth grade at the time of this interview. She was still learning about the thinking processes of a fourth-grade mind. Mr. Clements believed that presenters with teaching experience had credibility. Moreover, he felt that focused experience provided necessary knowledge:

If it’s too generic a topic, I would see that. If they’re trying to sell something that they consider as applicable in theatre and math and English and science, then I am
much less likely to be interested because there are so few things that are applicable that way.

Mr. Clements felt that at his career stage, the presenter needed to have “at least as much or more experience” in the content area than Mr. Clements did. He was not interested in hearing from someone who had a general teaching background.

**Identifying Appropriate Presenter for Expert Teachers**

With respect to identifying appropriate presenter, all six of the expert teachers had specific ideas about the presenter that they preferred in professional learning. For the purpose of this study, appropriate presenter referred to demonstrated attributes of the presenter that met the teachers’ needs when participating in professional learning.

Through analysis of their transcripts, data emerged in two categories: demonstrating credibility and demonstrating passion for their topic (see Table 4.13). All the expert teachers needed the presenters of their professional learning to demonstrate credibility, such as personal teaching experience. Ms. Hand was adamant about not wasting her professional learning time listening to hypothetical success stories. She needed to know that the presenter had “actually done [the new approach].” Ms. Merritt also believed that expert teachers were the best presenters because of their first-hand experience. She wanted to know that “they used [the approach] in their classrooms.” Mr. Angelo believed that his peers were the best presenters. In fact, he sought out the presenter’s experience-based knowledge. He referred to learning that could only be constructed by peers when asking the presenter questions like “what’s working in your area” or “what are some suggestions.” Similarly, Ms. Burt wanted “to pick their brains or their expertise.” She felt that she could do so only when the presenter had personal classroom experience. Four of
the expert teachers interviewed wanted to know that their presenters had actually implemented the content they were presenting. The expert teachers would also believe in the presenter’s credibility if they knew this person had actually authored the initiative being presented. Ms. Hand felt that way about the professional learning on Professional Learning Communities that she attended. One of the presenters was one of the authors of the book. Knowing that this presenter was involved in PLCs from the beginning “really helped sell it.” Ms. Wagner felt the same way about keynote speakers at conferences: “The keynote speakers are from all over the country, are very educated, and have new ideas. I learn new things. Those types of experiences are incredible. You’re dealing with the experts.”

Table 4.13

Expert Teachers Perspectives of Appropriate Presenter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 1: Demonstrating credibility</th>
<th>Sub-category 1: Having personal classroom experience</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category 2: Demonstrating passion</td>
<td>Sub-category 2: Authoring the initiative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Category 1: Demonstrating credibility.

All the expert teachers interviewed felt they needed the presenter of their professional learning to demonstrate credibility at this stage of their careers.

Sub-category 1: Having personal classroom experience.

Four of the six expert teachers recognized having classroom experience as an appropriate form of credibility. Ms. Hand felt a presenter should give experience-based ideas on how to implement new initiatives: “I think that’s the most valuable . . . because they made it real for us.” She referred to this type of presenter as a specialist:
It’s like they already did the experiment and they’ve already encountered all the problems that would come with it and all the questions or most of the questions, in fact, and they understood that it wasn’t perfect. So they took a mountain of information and, I hate to say it, but just, you know, it’s like they waded through the crap for me.

This presenter was able to give practical ideas, based on personal experience, for implementing a new concept. This person had credibility because he had actually worked with the content in a classroom. Ms. Merritt expressed similar feelings when speaking of presenters. She looked for “expert teachers” who used the content “in their classroom on a daily basis.” Ms. Merritt appreciated being able to see or hear about the successes that experienced teachers had in their classrooms. In fact, in her school, peers who had expertise in certain areas often offered professional learning: “It’s got to be something that you have done yourself and that you believe in.” Ms. Burt also wanted an experienced classroom teacher to present her professional learning: “If someone is going to be up there to lead the staff development, I want to be able to pick their brains or their expertise.” Ms. Burt felt that this expertise could only be gathered through experiential knowledge that gave the presenter the ability to understand classroom implications. Ms. Burt did not, for instance, “like it when some consultant who works for a company” went around the country selling a new trend or the latest “quick fix” without any practical experience to back it up. Mr. Angelo also believed that presenters who knew nothing about education, who were not even teachers, were unable to create a relevant connection between “what they’re selling” and how it would work in his classroom. Mr. Angelo believed that his peers, especially those from his own school, delivered the best
professional learning. As the only drama teacher in his school, he found that the opportunity to interact with a presenter from his school provided a wider lens through which to view teaching and learning. He felt that presenters who were also peers were “in the trenches with us. They know what’s going on within our county, our school system, and within our school.” Mr. Angelo felt that this common frame of reference was essential in a presenter.

*Sub-category 2: Authoring the initiative.*

Three of the six expert teachers recognized *authoring the initiative* as an appropriate standard for presenter credibility at this stage of their careers. Ms. Hand felt that when the presenter was also the author of the initiative, professional learning was most useful: “I think it’s probably one of the most valuable elements of professional learning. You can read five, six, seven, ten books on any one concept, but it’s like they made it real for us. That was the best part.” Ms. Hand believed that those who author initiatives can troubleshoot their implementation and prepare the teachers for what they could expect. Ms. Hand also believed that when the author presented the information, she was more likely to buy into the initiative:

Actually, a good specialist and one of the authors of the book were there. He was one of the presenters, and knowing that he was the one that wrote the book and was an integral part in the formation of the PLC [Professional Learning Community] helped me and really helped sell it to me. He was there at the beginning.

Not only did Ms. Hand appreciate the author’s attendance, but she also valued his contributions to her professional learning experience: “If we presented problems to him,
he had been there, he had heard them before, he has done it, he’s been with the research, he knew the answer.” Ms. Hand put credence in speakers who were also authors of educational initiatives. Ms. Merritt had comparable feelings about the presenter of professional learning. She recalled one professional learning opportunity in particular when the author of the writing workshop was also the author of children’s books: “He talked about how he came up with his ideas for writing.” Ms. Merritt felt that the author’s sharing of his creative process validated him as a presenter in this situation. Ms. Wagner regarded professional learning delivered by authors from another perspective. Rather than needing to be convinced of the author’s credibility, Ms. Wagner valued these learning opportunities because they exposed her to deeper levels of understanding of the topic. She participated in professional learning to “broaden her knowledge” of her field:

I had the opportunity to meet [the author] last spring. That was the most incredible experience, and to hear him. . . . I could have sat for hours at his feet. Just to hear him. I mean, the man is amazing, and he’s a genius at what he does. That’s his field. That’s what he does. I was just amazed.

Although the author spoke about topics that Ms. Wagner knew about, to hear so much more about them and realize how applicable they were, not only in math but in life, filled a professional need at her career stage.

*Category 2: Demonstrating passion.*

Three of the six expert teachers interviewed for this study believed that presenters of professional learning should demonstrate passion. Ms. Hand felt that presenters needed to be enthusiastic about the professional learning they delivered:
The way they came across with the idea of professional learning was useful. You know, the excitement, and everything, but just the motivation. They were almost like motivational speakers, and they were very excited about [the topic], and you could tell that they knew it, that they liked it, and that it worked.

Ms. Merritt also needed to see passion for the topic in presenters. She compared this passion to performance: “He was performing. He was. I guess it was a combination of performing and lecturing, but [it was] because he was so passionate about what he did that he made a connection with every audience he had.” Ms. Merritt summarized her belief about appropriate presenters when she said, “If you’re somebody who’s offering a professional learning opportunity, you’ve got to be passionate about what you do.” Mr. Angelo felt that a passionate speaker was necessary at a large-group, attendance-required professional learning experience. Although he was not a proponent of mandatory attendance, especially at a lecture, he felt that a passionate presenter could change that initial, negative attitude:

I think one of the best ones was when [the speaker] came to the Civic Center. The bad thing was that nobody really publicized how dynamic he was. It was one of those things, “We got a staff development; everybody has to go.” You had no choice; you were going. But once people got there, I mean, oh my gosh!

According to Mr. Angelo, a passionate presenter could reach even the most difficult participant in professional learning. All six of the expert teachers interviewed needed a credible presenter of their professional learning. This credibility could be earned through personal classroom experience. It could also be earned by authoring the initiative of the professional learning. In addition to credibility, three of the expert teachers interviewed
felt that a presenter who demonstrated passion about the topic was most effective in delivering professional learning.

*Appropriate Delivery Model*

This section reports findings related to the meta-category *Appropriate Delivery Model*. Table 4.14 summarizes these findings for each career stage.

Table 4.14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career Stage</th>
<th>Classification</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apprentice</td>
<td>Category 1: Including participation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-category 1: Using collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dimension 1: Discussing content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dimension 2: Posing questions and answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dimension 3: Sharing in groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-category 2: Using hands-on activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 2: Attending professional conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>Category 1: Including participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-category 1: Using collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-category 2: Sharing in groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-category 2: Using hands-on activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 2: Including observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 3: Attending Professional Conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>Category 1: Including participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-category 1: Using collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-category 2: Using hands-on activities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 2: Including observation</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Identifying Appropriate Delivery Model for Apprentice Teachers*

With respect to *identifying appropriate delivery model*, all the apprentice teachers had definite beliefs about their preferred delivery model. For the purpose of this study, *appropriate delivery model* referred to the format or design of the delivery model that
teachers needed when participating in professional learning. Through analysis of their transcripts, data emerged in two categories: including participation and attending professional conferences (see Table 4.15). The three apprentice teachers interviewed preferred to be active participants. Ms. Miller stated that she loved the class she was taking on Monday nights: “We all discuss; we all participate. That class has been very, very nice. We learn so much from each other in that kind of a class.” Ms. Papa felt she learned best “when I have hands-on things as opposed to sitting and listening to someone talk to me and give me information. I like to go hands-on because [the content] will be easier to take with me back to the classroom.” Mr. Joseph enjoyed presenting and sharing lesson plans with peers:

That particular day we were all bringing our favorite lesson plans, and two of us happened to bring the same thing as it turned out, but it was two different approaches into what we were looking at. That was valuable because even if it’s the same subject, there are other methods of doing things.

The apprentice teachers felt that professional learning that engaged them physically and intellectually best served their learning needs.

*Category 1: Including participation.*

All the apprentice teachers felt they needed professional learning designed around audience participation. The apprentice teachers identified two ways in which participation was a valuable component of professional learning: collaboration and hands-on activities.
Table 4.15

Apprentice Teachers’ Perspectives of Appropriate Delivery Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 1: Including participation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-category 1: Using collaboration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dimension 1: Discussing content</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dimension 2: Posing questions and answers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dimension 3: Sharing in groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-category 2: Using hands-on activities</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Category 2: Attending professional conferences

*Sub-category 1: Using collaboration.*

For the purpose of this study, *collaboration* was defined as the act of sharing ideas with one or more people. The interviews further disclosed different kinds of collaboration. The three apprentice teachers who participated in this study believed that collaborative discussion was an appropriate *dimension of collaboration.* Ms. Miller believed that unless it was a “procedures kind of class where I just want information and something written down so that you don’t have to try to remember everything,” some information could not be effectively delivered by lecture. For most content, Ms. Miller said she needed a discussion class:

[The presenter] puts us in groups, and we do different activities, and we get to talk to each other and then get back together as a group and find out what everyone has come up with. You learn so much in that kind of a class. You just can’t give [the content] as information.

Even if the topic were procedural, she still wanted to be able to ask questions about the content. Ms. Papa had similar feelings. Having discussions was one reason she liked being in smaller group settings. In reference to one professional learning experience, Ms. Papa said,
We sat in circles and we just talked. When somebody had something they really wanted to express, we’d get everybody’s attention and we’d go again. . . . I like being able to relate one on one as opposed to being lectured to. I learned a lot more from a class where we could sit and have a discussion.

Ms. Papa said that in discussions, she was “more willing to absorb” content. She felt like a sponge. Because Mr. Joseph was the only theatre teacher in his school, his content area professional learning classes were comprised of theatre teachers from all over his county. As a result, Mr. Joseph found participating in e-mail discussions with teachers in other buildings an effective form of collaboration. He described it as “a nice benefit of the electronic world” because “you could just shoot an e-mail to one another and say, ‘Hey, anybody ever heard of this book?’” All the apprentice teachers believed that discussion, either face-to-face or electronic, was an important way to promote participation in professional learning.

Posing and answering questions was a dimension of collaboration that two of the three apprentice teachers valued. Ms. Miller liked when a presenter asked for questions, especially when one asked for “one question from each table or two questions. Maybe you would ask a question you weren’t going to ask just by yourself.” Ms. Papa also liked the opportunity to ask questions. She felt that even if she participated in a lecture class, she wanted the lecturer to “at the end take questions.” Ms. Papa had a different perspective as well. She liked professional learning participants to ask questions of her. She appreciated when theatre teachers with more classroom experience than she had realized that she had knowledge that they did not have in many different areas of theatre:
They have knowledge to impart to me on acting things and acting techniques; whereas, I have technical experience. I did light. I did sound design. I was a stage manager. I’ve directed, you know, so I have these kinds of things that not everybody necessarily has.

It provided her an opportunity to be self-assured and validated: “You know, almost kind of like, ‘Wow, I knew something she didn’t, and she’s been teaching theatre for twenty years.’” Asking and answering questions was clearly a dimension of collaboration that met both Ms. Miller’s and Ms. Papa’s learning needs.

Two of the three apprentice teachers also valued sharing in groups as a dimension of collaboration in professional learning. Ms. Miller felt sharing in groups would even be good in a classroom management class. We could really talk about how to deal with the students. When you work in small groups, you do get to hear just lots of different situations. We hear all of each other’s experiences and ideas.

In reference to a summer professional learning experience, Ms. Papa said, “I got more out of that than all the other professional learning that I had taken all year” because “we weren’t just lectured to. There were a lot of things I wouldn’t have learned about had I not gone there.” She felt that sharing in small groups was better than a presenter saying, “Here are the hand-outs; we are now going to go over this.” Both of these teachers felt that the opportunity to share ideas and experiences in small groups enhanced their learning.

Sub-category 2: Using hands-on activities.

The interviews also disclosed that hands-on activities were a preferred way for presenters to encourage participation in professional learning experiences. Two of the
three apprentice teachers indicated that doing hands-on activities met their learning needs. Ms. Miller felt that hands-on activities made professional learning “just more fun, more interesting.” She spoke of one class in particular where the presenter encouraged experimentation with new technology: “He encouraged us to go up, a few at a time, and work on the Smart Board and just try it out ourselves. And a few of us went up there in groups, and it was really neat.” Ms. Papa also clearly preferred participating in hands-on activities:

We learned to edit, and he talked about editing, and then we actually got to do it. I found it more useful to be able to use the knowledge that I was given to prove that I actually did learn it and that I did know what was going on. Then it’ll be easier to take with me back to the classroom.

Ms. Papa felt she would be more inclined to apply a new technique if she had an opportunity to practice it first. That familiarity also gave her the confidence to adapt new information to her classroom: “I feel more willing to be able to play with whatever information I was given.” Ms. Papa specifically mentioned a presenter who taught her how to fix a broken plug on lighting equipment:

He had a great knowledge of what he was using, and it was things that we needed. Plus he taught us, or showed us, how to rewire a light. Then he gave us the opportunity; if you wanted to practice on that, you could. It was nice to be able to use that and talk about the different kinds of things you can use.

Category 2: Attending professional conferences.

Two of the apprentice teachers identified professional conferences as a meaningful way for delivering professional learning. When speaking of a conference she
attended in Philadelphia, Ms. Papa claimed that participating in a workshop that exposed her to new activities to do with her students “was very useful.” Conferences provided other opportunities as well:

The nice thing is that you get such a mish-mash of different people. There were people from private schools that were on trimesters instead of quarters or semesters from all over the country. Different programs. People that create their own programs. It was really interesting because we all have very differing programs.

Attending conferences also helped her realize that if “cool stuff is possible in other places, it’s probably possible in [her county].” Mr. Joseph attended conferences because they gave him the opportunity to watch others and reflect on his own practice. By comparing what he did with what he saw others do, he assessed his own needs: “I could see things that I would love to have gone in and sat in on.” Ms. Papa and Mr. Joseph believed that professional conferences provided an appropriate delivery model for professional learning at their career stage.

_identifying appropriate delivery model for professional teachers_

All the professional teachers had definite beliefs about their preferred delivery model. From analysis of their transcripts, data emerged in three categories: including participation, including observation, and attending professional conferences (see Table 4.16).

Category 1: Including participation.

All the professional teachers felt they needed professional learning designed around participation. According to Ms. Pringle, she had “to be up doing something” or
else she could not focus. Ms. Robins enjoyed having a presenter explain an idea, mention several activities that enhanced teaching that idea, and then give her the opportunity to actually do it. Mr. Clements appreciated working with other teachers to map out a lesson plan from “beginning to end.” The professional teachers identified three sub-categories of participation: collaboration, group work, and hands-on activities.

Sub-category 1: Using collaboration.

Two of the three professional teachers believed that they needed a professional learning design that incorporated collaboration. For the purpose of this study, collaboration was defined as the act of sharing ideas with one or more people. Ms. Robins needed other teachers to suggest how her students might react to a new activity:

You’re figuring out what kinds of questions they would ask, and how am I going to be able to answer this question. Because when you play [the activity or game] with a peer, which would be another teacher, they can help you figure out scenarios that might come up in your classroom.

Together, Ms. Robins and her peers would put themselves in the role of the child. Mr. Clements felt that collaboration was one of the best delivery methods for professional learning:
The best ones I’ve found are when I get together with colleagues, and we are able to talk about problems that we are having, solutions to them, and new ideas.

“What are your problems? What do you guys suggest?” I talk it out with other people.

Mr. Clements liked to be engaged as a problem solver so that he could apply suggestions to his particular situation.

*Sub-category 2: Sharing in groups.*

Two of the three professional teachers believed that they needed a professional learning design that included sharing in groups. Ms. Pringle appreciated professional learning that used group work to access large quantities of reading on one topic: “Rather than have everybody read the same article, you’re having many articles and so you get more information. We read articles and then we present information to the class on that. You’re breaking down the information.” She valued not being responsible for all the material. She felt that as a reader or a listener, “you focus on a few things. Then you’re doing better anyhow than if you read a bunch of stuff and don’t remember any of it.” Ms. Pringle wanted to identify important ideas from reading or listening. She also needed group work because it divided the class into smaller chunks. She recognized that she, just like her students, functioned better if the class format changed every fifteen to twenty minutes: “I don’t know how these kids sit through a whole day of school, honestly. I can’t focus.” Ms. Pringle also enjoyed a group activity in which professional learning participants came up with different ways to present a topic. One example she explained involved employing specific learning strategies:
We were given a topic, and we got a whole big packet of information. I think it was about the Lewis and Clark exploration. We were working in our groups on how we would come up with different ways for us to, you know, utilize, to teach it. It had to be using specific strategies. That was great because, you know, it wasn’t making us cut things out of construction paper, but it was also using what we do best as teachers: working in groups.

She enjoyed working in groups because it required her to be a thinker as opposed to only being a receptor. Ms. Robins also needed group work: “I think that’s a great environment and a great learning experience.” She was referring to how she wanted to learn about new games to use with her students:

It was one about partner games. First of all, we learned about the topics. We played the games, and then we swapped groups, and we played it with another group of people because people play games differently, and then we made the games.

Ms. Robins used group work to familiarize herself with content. Both Ms. Pringle and Mr. Robins believed that incorporating group work was an effective model for presenting professional learning.

Sub-category 3: Using hands-on activities.

Two of the three professional teachers believed that they needed a professional learning design that incorporated hands-on activities. At her career stage, Ms. Robins found that
any kind of staff development that has some kind of hands-on, take-home activity really helps. I find that more beneficial than somebody just giving me ideas and me not being able to have a “make and take.”

She felt that if she had created a finished product in a professional learning session, she was more likely to use it than if she planned on making it on her own time: “I just feel like if I don’t have time to do it then, I just push it off to the waysides, and I don’t ever get around to doing it.” She felt that classes that offered her lots of ideas were helpful but were not as useful as they could be because she never took the time to make the props for the activity: “But if I don’t have time to sit down and make it, then it’s easy just to push it aside and say, ‘oh, I’ll get to it later, and I’ll make it later,’ and it just sits in that pile that piles up forever.” One of the reasons an activity sat there forever was that it was buried under other ideas, and she forgot about it. She was more likely to use information and activities when she could “actually make the activity to where you can take back and use it in your classroom the next day.” Ms. Robins knew she was a hands-on learner and felt she thrived in an environment that permitted her to do things hands-on. Mr. Clements also valued professional learning that offered hands-on opportunities. He was focused on promoting his theatre program at school. During a previous professional learning class, Mr. Clements created a promotional pamphlet. He was able to create his own very quick, very brief publicity packet. Actually able to produce something useful for what it is that I have to do, promoting the program and being able to give that template to students and say, “hey, you guys, now do this.”
He valued this hands-on experience because it was something that he could apply. Both Ms. Robins and Mr. Clements wanted hands-on activities included in their professional learning experiences because they were more likely to use what they created.

*Category 2: Including observation.*

All the professional teachers felt they needed professional learning designed to include observation. Ms. Pringle identified two modes of observation that she found useful. One of them involved watching other teachers. She felt that she learned about teaching styles from observing others teach, whether to children or adults. Referring to one particular professional learning class, Ms. Pringle commented, “We have a teacher present a lesson, which I like a lot because we don’t really get to see teachers teaching very much.” When asked why this kind of observation would be beneficial, she responded,

> to see another teacher with a different style, how they present, maybe the same kind of lesson that you would present, that would be great. I think teachers are constantly, at least good teachers, are constantly critiquing themselves, you know, and just being able to say, “well, how do I measure up against this?”

Ms. Pringle noted that this comparison did not indicate competition with that other teacher. Rather, the comparison indicated a personal challenge. Ms. Pringle also spoke of peer coaching that she participated in during her first year of teaching. She valued that professional learning experience because she had the opportunity to design her learning by telling her partner, “Okay, this is what I want you to look for.” Ms. Pringle wanted her partner to critique her with intensity. Ms. Robins considered observation from a different
perspective. She felt it was “hard to make sure that every kid’s needs are being met.” She learned about diverse learning styles by watching others learn:

It’s interesting to me just to watch other people in the class and how they engage with others, to see that they might still be learning and taking away the same thing that I am, but I have to do the activity. I can bring that back to my class because I don’t require the kids, when I get the manipulatives out, to do it. I need those kids to kind of realize that this is what they need, too. And if they don’t need it, they don’t have to do it. I guess that it helps me see that there are different learning styles out there, and that I have to make accommodations for such.

Ms. Robins realized that there was a definite possibility that her students interpreted lessons differently than she intended them: “I quickly realized that the way I interpreted it is not how they understood it, and I had to go back and rethink how I needed to instruct them.” She was acutely aware of her responsibility to make sure that she taught to everyone’s needs. She felt that observing others learn helped her pursue that goal. Mr. Clements valued observation for different reasons. He learned from watching professionals in the theatre business in a workshop setting:

They’re telling the kids what their job is, what they have to do, how to get an audition, how to get a role, how to make a character better. It sure helps if I can go back to my classroom and tell all thirty-five, even though there are only three of them who want to seriously go into theatre, “this is the reality of it. This is what you’re going to have to do whether you are an electrician, whether you are an actor, or whatever.”
Mr. Clements felt that observing theatre professionals explain their work helped him know what to tell his own students to prepare them for the reality of that career. Mr. Clements also valued watching professional performances in New York. Having that “real experience” was good because it presented him with the opportunity to see the possibilities: “You know, obviously we can’t do the things that they do, but at the same time, my students can see the best acting possible.” He also thought that observing video was an appropriate professional learning delivery method. Mr. Clements mentioned two uses of video. One was to watch videos of professional performances. Although it was not as “real” as attending a live performance, this type of observation still permitted him to “see the possibilities.” He also thought that watching video of others teaching was suitable. He felt that sometimes it was easier to be objective when watching teachers on video than watching them in person.

*Category 3: Attending professional conferences.*

Two of the three professional teachers considered attending professional conferences an appropriate delivery model for professional learning. Ms. Pringle described her experience at a National Conference of Teachers of English (NCTE) as fantastic: “It was probably the most exciting professional learning experience I’ve ever had. Just having everyone so fired up about teaching English was probably the best part.” She enjoyed being around other English teachers: “It was really cool being in a huge conference center full of English teachers that are passionate about what you’re passionate about.” One prominent memory she described was a session about teaching a multi-genre research paper. She did not feel that the teaching was unique, but she was intrigued by the topic. She felt attending a professional conference was appropriate
professional learning because she was exposed to different topics that she could incorporate into her classroom. Another reason she believed that professional conferences were appropriate professional learning was that she got to see and hear people that she had only previously studied about in graduate school. She felt it was “dynamic and inspiring”:

I think teachers get really bogged down a lot of time and you’re isolated and you forget why you’re [teaching], and I think that being in a community of impassioned professionals is really important.

Ms. Pringle believed that attending professional conferences broke down the isolation and strengthened the sense of community among teachers. Mr. Clements valued attending the Thespian Conference. Unlike the NCTE, which was organized and presented by teachers of English, the Thespian Conference was organized and presented by professionals who were in the “real world business of theatre”:

At Thespian Conference, what happens is we see a whole bunch of shows, and we go to a whole bunch of workshops. The workshops are done by professionals. They’ll bring in people from New York and professional actors and technicians from Atlanta and everywhere. They also bring in college representatives whom we are able to ask questions.

They are not only on the technical side of theatre but also on the acting side of theatre: “I can go to them and ask questions if I’m having a problem with something, and a lot of times it’s just simply sitting in a workshop.” Ms. Pringle and Mr. Clements felt that immersion in these environments was an effective way to develop themselves professionally.
Identifying Appropriate Delivery Model for Expert Teachers

All six of the expert teachers felt that the best way to deliver professional learning was through a varied delivery model. They compared themselves to their students who thrived in a classroom whose format kept changing. Ms. Smeal felt that professional learning that did not present a mix of delivery models “stunted her growth” because she was not going to be very interested. Ms. Merritt’s comments were in line with this perspective:

I think we’re a lot like the kids. We like to not just have a professor stand up in front of a classroom and lecture. We like to see. We like to hear. We like to do, and when you can use as many senses as possible to learn something, then you internalize it.

For the purpose of this study, appropriate delivery model referred to a delivery model that met the teachers’ needs when participating in professional learning. Through analysis of their transcripts, data emerged in two categories: including participation and including observation (see Table 4.17). The expert teachers’ interviews also revealed that (a) collaboration and hands-on activities were believed to be most effective types of participation and (b) observing their peers teach lessons and observing their presenters model lessons were equally as effective.

Table 4.17

| Category 1: Including participation | Sub-category 1: Using collaboration |
| Instant dilation | Sub-category 2: Using hands-on activities |

| Category 2: Including observation |
Category 1: Including participation.

All the expert teachers felt they needed professional learning designed to include participation. They needed to be physically involved in their learning. Four of the expert teachers identified collaboration as an appropriate delivery model of professional learning at their career stage. Ms. Hand, Ms. Smeal, Ms. Merritt, and Mr. Angelo recognized that their peers were the best source of expertise. When this researcher asked Ms. Hand what she needed professionally from her professional learning, she responded, “more collaboration. We found that over and over again in the classes.” A lack of collaboration was exactly why Ms. Smeal chose not to participate in online courses. In reference to one class, she said,

There were fifty people in [the initial meeting of the class]. Now granted, you’re only going to have two meetings, the first one and the last one, and the rest you are doing online, and you were just talking back and forth with your professor. There’s nobody to talk to except for your professor, no colleagues. Some of these professors are just, are almost intimidating.

Ms. Merritt also mentioned the importance of collaboration. She shared that teachers in her building wanted her to offer professional learning in her school: “The fifth grade teachers who are always working on improving writing skills asked me if I would consider doing professional learning on future problem solving so they could see what it was all about.” Ms. Merritt’s comment demonstrated that even this brief collaborative conversation exemplified how the professional exchange of ideas among peers was in demand. Mr. Angelo felt that collaboration among his peers was the most successful form of professional learning: “We tend to do a lot of collaboration among our teachers and
create our own staff developments.” The other category that emerged from the data regarding the inclusion of participation focused on using hands-on activities. Five of the six expert teachers identified hands-on activities as an appropriate delivery model of professional learning at their career stage. Ms. Smeal “liked to have activities and things to bring back to her classroom,” especially when they were presented in conjunction with time “to practice these skills and try them out.” Ms. Merritt needed practice time when learning new technology. She was willing to spend “bigger chunks of time” attending professional learning when some of that time was spent “practicing new skills.” She needed this time to internalize the new skill so that she did not forget how to use it. Mr. Angelo valued hands-on activities because they got him “moving around” and because they gave him a level of engagement that lecturing just could not provide. Ms. Burt needed reassurance that a new skill would work in her classroom. One reason she needed hands-on participation was to “get an idea of how the kids would feel” doing the new skill. Ms. Wagner appreciated hands-on activities for the variety they added to professional learning and because for newer teachers, activities ensured that they would not attempt to “teach something that you don’t understand.” Five of the six expert teachers valued opportunities to practice new skills they acquired at professional learning.

Sub-category 1: Using collaboration.

Four of the six expert teachers interviewed identified collaboration as an appropriate delivery model of professional learning at their career stage. Ms. Hand felt that collaboration provided an opportunity for professional learning participants to tap into each other’s knowledge. In fact, she commented that she and her peers would opt to collaborate “instead of really doing what we should have been doing”: 
How could the idea be implemented? What were some possible ways we could implement it? How could we get people on board? How could we get the committee started? It was very, very beneficial. Obviously, five or six minds are better than one, and we were great together. We worked very well. Five heads were just awesome.

Furthermore, Ms. Hand recognized that collaboration also helped to identify and adjust “bad ideas” to fit her teaching situation:

We were very good about taking the idea that they gave us in the professional learning and then trying to make it our own. The actual structure they gave us was impossible in our scenario, and none of us could have done that on our own. But collaboration is awesome because it really does give you ideas and it gives you a springboard for ideas.

Ms. Hand also valued collaborating with teachers from other teaching environments because they offered possible answers to her questions from their perspectives: “Okay, I like this idea, but what about this and what about this and what about this? It was real. That was the best part. It was really great to collaborate.” Ms. Smeal also needed to collaborate when participating in professional learning. She valued collaborating with new and veteran teachers alike:

We go to staff development, and we see teachers from brand new teachers to veteran teachers, you know, close to retirement. I’ve been inspired by some of these first-year teachers, some of the things that they’re bringing. I do like to listen to veteran teachers, but I think us older teachers need to listen to these younger teachers, too.
Ms. Smeal felt that without staying current with changing educational practices, she would be bored. She commented, “I wonder how the people with yellow lesson plans survive.” Mrs. Merritt spoke of a different type of collaboration. She appreciated the exchange of ideas that mentoring encouraged:

Actually, the people who are the mentors and the people who are the mentees have all expressed how they have learned from one another because the mentors are learning things from these young enthusiastic teachers and then vice versa.

Ms. Merritt also commented on “one of the most valuable opportunities for collaboration” that her growing county could no longer offer:

Many years ago, when I first started teaching, once a month we would go to the county location, and we would exchange ideas about what we were doing in our classroom. I think we would get a lot out of it now. If we can learn from each other, we’d all be better teachers.

She was sorry that her county no longer engaged in that activity, a change that she attributed to lack of time and money. She felt that teachers needed to learn from each other and hear from each other. Mr. Angelo also identified collaboration as an appropriate delivery model for professional learning at his career stage. About his area of fine arts, he said,

We tend to do a lot of collaboration among our teachers and create our own staff developments. The ones that have been most successful for me are sort of the sharing of ideas and sort of a question-and-answer session back and forth between teachers.
He felt that problem solving and dialogue among peers was much better than “some speaker coming in to talk to us.”

_sub-category 2: Using hands-on activities._

Five of the six expert teachers felt that hands-on activities were an appropriate delivery model for professional learning at their career stage. Ms. Smeal described herself as a hands-on learner who gained knowledge through doing and not just reading: “I want [the presenters] to give [the participants] time to implement activities among my colleagues where we get to, you know, practice these skills and try them out.” She became frustrated when a presenter simply handed her a sheet of paper and said, “Here, this activity works. Try it.” She needed to “actually make something or do an activity in math where there’s manipulatives involved, and we actually do the activity together.” Ms. Merritt felt the same way: “If you don’t use it, you lose it. You’ve got to have time to practice these new skills.” However, Ms. Merritt also said that having to participate in “cutesy little activities that you really didn’t need to do” was a waste of her time. She wanted her professional learning and the time she spent on it to be meaningful. Mr. Angelo felt that the perfect professional learning experience involved hands-on activities. He needed to be an active participant in his learning:

As a teacher, I realize how hard it is for the kids to sit still for any length of time. When we have to sit through some of these staff developments that are mandatory, that you have to go through and all you’re doing is listening, you look around the room, and teachers have their plan books out, they’re grading papers, and they’re not really actively listening to what’s going on.
One of the activities he liked was “sort of a mock lesson” in which he actually tried to implement the content he was learning. He mostly found this type of hands-on learning at workshops. Ms. Burt also valued the opportunity to practice new learning:

I like it when [the presenters] have you run through things exactly the way it would be for a student because then you can get an idea of how the kid would feel in it. And it also gives you an idea of how to conduct the activity. . . . Maybe you wouldn’t go through the whole activity, but you would go through enough of it to get a feel for it, for what it would be like. And with what I teach right now, it’s really important to actually go through the activity the way the kid would.

Ms. Burt needed her professional learning to be active so that she could practice new knowledge before she did an activity with her class. Ms. Wagner appreciated having hands-on activities included, but she did not believe that they were always necessary: “It’s great for it to be interactive; it’s great for it to be hands-on, but I don’t think that always has to be true for it to be great.” But most of the expert teachers believed that using hands-on activities that promoted learning by doing was an appropriate delivery model of professional learning at this career stage.

**Category 2: Including observation.**

Three of the six expert teachers felt they needed professional learning designed to include observation. Three of the interviews revealed that the participants in the study considered observing their peers in the classroom an effective delivery model at this stage of their career. One of these three expert teachers also believed that observing presenters’ model teaching was an appropriate mode for professional learning at this career stage.

Ms. Smeal found peer observations extremely helpful:
I’ve often gone to observe other teachers that I know are successful teachers.

We’re allowed to get a substitute and just go watch an expert teacher. You know, some teachers have really become expert teachers in some areas.

Ms. Smeal believed that watching expert teachers in action helped her become a better teacher. Ms. Merritt felt the same way about a similar program at her school:

One of the things we have found that we really liked was at the beginning of the school year. We were provided with an opportunity; it was a day where subs rotated and provided an opportunity for us to go in and observe our colleagues teaching certain things. We knew ahead of time what they were teaching and what we could get from this observation, so we could pick what teachers we wanted to go in and observe teaching.

She felt it was “a great thing to learn from one another.” She commented about a workshop that she attended where there was an actual class going on that implemented the strategies she was learning at that time: “We were like a fly on the wall watching expert teachers with the Writing Workshop. It was great. I just can’t say enough about it.”

Mr. Angelo also believed that conducting peer observation was an appropriate delivery model for professional learning.

We went around to other people’s schools, and I just saw how they organized their back stage area. And that little bit got me so excited and pumped to come back here and have some neat ideas I can do with the kids on organization . . . just seeing what they do.

In addition to peer observation, the interview data revealed that one of the six expert teachers felt that watching the presenter model new learning was an appropriate delivery
model for professional learning. Ms. Smeal noted that in professional learning in math and writing, instructor modeling was very useful to her. She felt that watching a knowledgeable instructor model lessons sparked her interest: “I’ve been involved with language arts and math professional learning where the presenter used lots of modeling.” Math coaches who visited her school provided one of the most effective forms of modeling: “They have coaches that will actually come out and do a lesson with your class. You can watch them teach the children, which I found very helpful.” Ms. Smeal attributed her need for presenter modeling to the fact that she was a visual learner.

To summarize Theme 1: Apprentice Teachers’ Perspectives of Appropriate Professional Learning, the apprentice teachers’ interviews revealed three meta-categories: identifying appropriate content, identifying appropriate presenter, and identifying appropriate delivery model. In the meta-category of appropriate content, three categories emerged from the interviews. One of these categories was presenting immediately applicable information. The data revealed that sub-categories of this category were learning about classroom management strategies, technical training, and local school procedures. The other two categories were presenting alternative teaching strategies and providing printed resources. Another meta-category of Theme 1 was identifying appropriate presenter. Two categories that unfolded through data analysis were demonstrating credibility and demonstrating approachability. The final meta-category of Theme 1 was identifying appropriate delivery model. In the category of including participation, the apprentice teachers believed that using collaboration was an effective sub-category. When the teachers collaborated, they preferred the dimensions of discussing content, posing and answering questions, and sharing in groups. Two of the
three apprentice teachers considered another category of appropriate delivery model: attending professional conferences. All the apprentice teachers who participated in this study were specific about what they needed for professional learning to be career-stage appropriate.

To summarize Theme 2: Professional Teachers’ Perspectives of Appropriate Professional Learning, the professional teachers’ interviews revealed three meta-categories: identifying appropriate content, identifying appropriate presenter, and identifying appropriate delivery model. In the meta-category of appropriate content, four categories emerged from the interviews. One of these categories was offering choice of topics. The data revealed that all the professional teachers needed to choose their own topics for professional learning. They felt that they knew their interests and needs and required the leverage to choose professional learning topics that addressed them. Another one of these categories was presenting immediately applicable information. The professional teachers recognized that some of the information needed to be adapted for their own classrooms, but they still felt that the knowledge was pertinent to their teaching situations and could be applied immediately. The third category of identifying appropriate content was presenting new information. This new information could be additional activities or games to use with students, new ways to present familiar topics, or new technology. The final category was presenting anecdotal information. All the teachers regarded anecdotal information as appropriate content for their professional learning. They felt that hearing others’ teaching experiences presented additional teaching ideas as well as a practical slant to theoretical information. Another meta-category of Theme 2 was identifying appropriate presenter. Only one category unfolded
through data analysis, having recent or current teaching experience. All the professional teachers interviewed felt that professional learning should be presented by a teaching practitioner. This practical experience created a common ground between the presenter and the participants and also became the basis of the presenter’s credibility. The final meta-category of Theme 2 was identifying appropriate delivery model. In the category of including participation, the professional teachers believed that using collaboration was an effective sub-category. They also valued sharing in groups as a means of employing active engagement. The other type of participation that the professional teachers identified was providing hands-on activities. The data revealed another category of appropriate delivery model: employing observation. Two of the professional teachers interviewed felt that observing other teachers was an appropriate delivery model of professional learning. These observations helped the professional teachers recognize diverse teaching styles that they could use in their own classrooms. Observations also helped one teacher recognize that diverse teaching styles could accommodate diverse learning styles. Another teacher appreciated the observations conducted by her coaching partner. By telling her partner what to look for, this teacher felt she had designed her own professional learning. The data also revealed one final category of appropriate delivery model: attending professional conferences. Two of the three professional teachers felt that attending professional conferences was an appropriate delivery model. They believed they needed the unique topics, real life experiences, and sense of professional community that conferences provided. All the professional teachers who participated in this study were specific about what they needed for professional learning to be career-stage appropriate.
To summarize Theme3: Expert Teachers’ Perspectives of Appropriate Professional Learning, the expert teachers’ interviews revealed three meta-categories: identifying appropriate content, identifying appropriate presenter, and identifying appropriate delivery model. In the meta-category of identifying appropriate content, three categories emerged from the data. The expert teachers identified presenting research-based topics, offering choice of topics, and providing new methods as appropriate content for professional learning at their career stage. When considering content, these teachers felt that it was necessary for professional learning content to be based in research. This research could take the form of documented classroom implementation of the content or formal studies that verified the positive impact that the new content had on student learning. The data revealed that teachers wanted to know that, even if there were glitches that needed to be worked out, what they learned in professional learning would work in their own classrooms. One of the expert teachers voiced another reason that she needed professional learning to be research-based. For her to have faith in the new content, this expert teacher needed to know that the basic premise for the content was based in documented fact. Without this assurance, she could not put credence into the content and would not use it in her classroom. The expert teachers also believed that professional learning should offer freedom of choice. At this stage of their careers, these teachers needed to direct their own learning by choosing the content they learned. They felt they were capable of accurately diagnosing their strengths, weaknesses, and interests. As a result, the expert teachers felt that they were capable of making responsible choices for their professional learning. These choices provided needed expertise, sparked their interest, or expanded their knowledge base. The expert teachers also needed content that
provided new methods they could use in their classrooms. These teachers felt that repetitive content in professional learning was counterproductive to its purpose. Instead of strengthening them as teachers by enhancing their teaching practice, they felt that repetitive material disengaged them from the learning experience and prohibited them from recognizing anything that might be useful. In the meta-category of identifying appropriate presenter, two categories emerged from the data. The expert teachers identified having classroom experience and authoring the initiate as appropriate presenter characteristics for professional learning at their career stage. No presenter characteristic spoke as loudly to the expert teachers as having classroom experience. These teachers needed to be able to relate to other presenters. The best way to do so was initially to connect to each other as classroom teachers. This shared experience created a camaraderie that the expert teachers needed. The other way that presenters developed credibility was by authoring the content of the professional learning. Intimate knowledge of the “ins and outs” of the material enabled the presenters to answer questions about or anticipate challenges with implementing the new material. In the meta-category of identifying appropriate delivery model, two categories emerged from the data. First, the expert teachers identified participation as an appropriate delivery element for professional learning at their career stage. They felt participation in their learning helped them contribute to it. The expert teachers felt that contributing took two forms: collaboration and hands-on activities. Through collaboration, the expert teachers could share ideas, answer each other’s questions, or brainstorm new ideas. Using hands-on activities enabled the professional learning participants to practice with new content, to role play as students, or to create manipulatives for their classrooms. The expert teachers felt that
including participation in the delivery model for professional learning helped them learn. The other category of appropriate delivery model that emerged from the data focused on including observation. The expert teachers recognized that observing other teachers and presenters was an appropriate delivery model for professional learning at their career stage. Observation provided practical examples of the learning in action that gave expert teachers new ideas to use in their own classrooms. Observation also presented a basis of comparison for the expert teacher to measure against. All the expert teachers who participated in this study were specific about what they needed for professional learning to be career-stage appropriate.

Overarching Themes

The teachers of each represented career stage identified specific elements of professional learning that they believed to be career-stage appropriate. Within each of the themes discussed above, three meta-categories emerged: identifying appropriate content, identifying appropriate presenter, and identifying appropriate delivery model. Continued analysis of the data yielded several noteworthy ideas that study participants felt were important elements of professional learning at their career stage. For the purpose of this study, ideas were considered noteworthy when they were held be at least one participant from each of the career-stage groups. The total number of participants was 12; therefore, \( N = 12 \). These similarities formed overarching themes that applied to at least four interviewed teachers, regardless of their individual career stage. These themes are described in the following sub-sections.
Overarching Theme 1: Apprentice, Professional, and Expert Teachers’ Perspectives of Career-Stage Appropriate Content in Professional Learning Programs

Apprentice, professional, and expert teachers who participated in this study identified career-stage appropriate content as a necessary element of professional learning programs (see Table 4.18). Nine of the twelve teachers interviewed needed to choose their own topics for study when participating in professional learning. The teachers wanted to be interested in what they were learning and not waste their time sitting through repetitive classes. Freedom to choose also reflected the teachers’ ability to assess their own learning needs. Nine of the twelve teachers interviewed felt that professional learning should present alternative teaching strategies. These teachers specifically participated in professional learning to increase their repertoire of activities to use with students. They wanted new and different ways to teach familiar topics and address their students’ learning needs. Finally, four of the twelve teachers interviewed felt that professional learning should provide printed resources (i.e., entire packets of reproducible materials, lists of web sites or publications where more information about the topic could be found, and digital templates that teachers and students could use to create their own products).

Table 4.18
Apprentice, Professional, and Expert Teachers’ Perspectives of Career-stage Appropriate Content in Professional Learning Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identifying Appropriate Content in Professional Learning</th>
<th>Offering choice</th>
<th>Presenting alternative teaching strategies</th>
<th>Providing printed resources</th>
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<tr>
<td>N=12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
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Overarching Theme 2: Apprentice, Professional, and Expert Teachers’ Perspectives of Career-Stage Appropriate Presenter of Professional Learning Programs

Apprentice, professional, and expert teachers who participated in this study identified presenter characteristics that they believed were essential to career-stage appropriate professional learning programs (see Table 4.19). Nine of the twelve teachers interviewed needed the presenter of their professional learning to demonstrate credibility. Presenters could earn their credibility in various ways. For instance, they could be published, well-known keynote speakers. These speakers were credible because they demonstrated broad and deep content knowledge when they spoke. They could also be working professionals or specialists in the content area (e.g., a theatre lighting practitioner who could demonstrate lighting techniques). According to ten of the twelve study participants, the best way for a presenter to earn credibility was to have personal classroom experience. These presenters were believable because they shared a frame of reference with professional learning participants. They understood the workings of a classroom. In addition to sharing content knowledge, presenters with classroom experience could share new materials, answer specific questions, model new strategies, predict student reactions, and troubleshoot implementation difficulties.

Table 4.19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identifying Appropriate Presenter of Professional Learning</th>
<th>Demonstrating credibility</th>
<th>Having classroom experience</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>N=12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Overarching Theme 3: Apprentice, Professional, and Expert Teachers’ Perspectives of Career-Stage Appropriate Delivery Model of Professional Learning Programs

Apprentice, professional, and expert teachers who participated in this study identified delivery model characteristics that they believed were essential to career-stage appropriate professional learning programs (see Table 4.20). All twelve of the study participants, regardless of their career stage, felt that an appropriate delivery model of professional learning included participation. Teachers at all stages wanted to be actively involved in their learning. The “sit and get” delivery model, dominated by lecture, created boredom and disinterest. It also resulted in purposeful disengagement by teachers who would bring other work to do or create shopping lists during learning sessions. The interview transcripts revealed that teachers tolerated lecture for short periods of time only when it introduced new material. Instead, the teachers wanted to be engaged in their learning. Professional learning that used collaboration was identified by nine of the twelve teachers interviewed as career-stage appropriate. They believed that developing ideas while working together was beneficial for all involved participants. These teachers needed to collaborate to figure out how generic knowledge and skills could be adapted to fit their particular schools. They believed that practicing new skills together or sharing problems and solutions helped them broaden their learning and benefit from each other’s experiences. Nine of the twelve teachers interviewed also felt that hands-on activities were a necessary component of an appropriate delivery model. These teachers wanted to experiment with new activities, to figure out how they worked, and to fumble through this process in the company of other teachers doing the same things. These teachers also collaborated to anticipate student reactions to new activities. Instead of “sit and get”
content, the study participants wanted to “make and take” manipulatives that they could use immediately in their classrooms. The teachers also wanted to model new lessons to their peers in order to receive honest feedback. Four of the twelve teachers interviewed needed to share in groups. Unlike collaborating to work through new material together, sharing in groups gave the teachers an opportunity to listen to suggestions from others and brainstorm solutions to teaching issues. Sharing in groups also reassured the teachers that, although their situations were unique, there was common ground between their own experiences and the experiences of other teachers. Four of the twelve teachers believed that attending professional conferences was an appropriate delivery model for professional learning at their career stage. Conferences provided a variety of delivery models, presenters, and related content. The teachers who attended conferences enjoyed being immersed in a community of professionals with the same interests. Conferences empowered attendees to pick and choose their learning, even so far as to reserve the freedom to walk out of a session if it did not meet their needs.

Overall, it was apparent that teachers at different career stages had specific needs related to content, presenter, and delivery model of their professional learning. However,
the data from this study also revealed that there were common preferences across different career-stages.

Differences across Career Stages

While overlapping themes emerged, the study also uncovered differences in the teachers’ learning needs across different career stages. The professional and expert teachers were adamant about choosing their professional learning. While the apprentice teachers expressed preferences for particular professional learning topics, these teachers were content with attending mandatory professional learning because they were new to everything. They had not participated in many professional learning opportunities; as a result, they were not faced with sitting through repetitive content. Apprentice teachers welcomed anything that would help them survive their first years of teaching. Their interview responses suggested a sense of desperation. Ms. Miller felt defeated by her poorly behaved math students and was willing to try anything to improve her classroom management. She believed that these students behaved poorly because she was doing something wrong. Ms. Miller felt she needed strategies that she could apply immediately to get results. She felt that doing the right thing would reap the right outcome. She focused on performing management tasks as opposed to creating a learning environment. She did not yet realize that performing management tasks in the absence of a respectful student-teacher relationship would not guarantee well-behaved students who focused on learning math. Ms. Papa also revealed a sense of urgency. She was frustrated that after nine weeks of school, she still did not know what to do when a child misbehaved. She commented on her need for practical information, not philosophical ideas. These teachers wanted concrete behaviors and printed resources that they could literally grasp onto. The
only apprentice teacher who did not feel this way was Mr. Joseph because he had previously worked in his school building.

In contrast to the insecurity displayed by the apprentice teachers, the professional and expert teachers were deeply confident. They attended professional learning to build upon firm foundations. These teachers felt that they were already successful. As a result, they were adamant about their right to autonomy when choosing professional learning. They had definite ideas about what they needed and were selective in what they attended. They wanted more activities to provide classroom variety or to achieve better student results. These teachers were attuned to diverse student learning styles and sought methods to address them. They wanted to pick the brains of their peers. These teachers showed no tolerance for time wasted on unproven theories. They wanted data to serve as testimony for the success of new ideas. These more experienced teachers had information that they wanted to share, as well. Sharing ideas gave them a sense of self-worth that resulted from being a resource for other teachers. Professional learning was reciprocal. Recognizing that they were members of a teaching community, not isolated, these teachers wanted to help each other improve. Instead of worrying about “getting it right,” professional and expert teachers were interested in “getting better” so that their students would excel. One of the expert teachers, Ms. Wagner, went beyond participating in professional learning to improve her daily practice. She was interested in knowledge for the sake of knowledge. She believed that deepening her understanding of her content through continuous learning would help her model life-long intellectual growth for her students. She felt that instilling in her students a love of learning was just as beneficial as teaching them her content.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

This study explored perspectives of career-stage appropriate professional learning held by twelve teachers from Grand County Public Schools in the southeastern United States. In this chapter, the research study is summarized, the findings are discussed, and the implications for future research, for practitioners, and for institutions of higher learning are presented.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to describe teachers’ perspectives of the career-stage appropriateness of professional growth opportunities offered in one countywide school system in southeastern United States. The central research question was “what are teachers’ perspectives of the career-stage appropriateness of their formal professional learning programs?” The intent was to discover more specifically teachers’ beliefs about and attitudes toward the effectiveness of professional learning activities (i.e., whether professional learning activities met the teachers’ needs).

A grounded theory research design was used to study the perspectives of twelve teachers in various career stages who had participated in formal professional learning experiences. In accordance with grounded theory methodology, purposeful sampling was used to select the participants, and in-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted with the participants beginning in November 2005. Constant comparative analysis was used to collect, code, and analyze the data, which included interviews, documents, participant
reflection journals, and researcher memos. Recurring concepts in the participants’ perspectives were identified and organized into three main themes and nine meta-categories, and theoretical ideas grounded in the data emerged from on-going analysis and interpretation of the data.

Symbolic interactionism was the guiding theoretical framework used to shape this study and to inform the researcher’s interpretation of the findings. Symbolic interactionism is defined as “activity in which humans interpret each other’s gestures and act on the basis of meaning yielded by interpretation” (Blumer, 1969, pp. 65-66). The researcher, utilizing these components of symbolic interactionism, identified and analyzed the perspectives through which participants in formal professional learning determined career-stage appropriate content, career-stage appropriate presenter, and career-stage appropriate delivery model.

Three levels of findings were noted and discussed in Chapter 4: individual career-stage findings, overarching themes, and differences in learning preferences across career stages. Appropriate professional learning experiences noted by teachers from all represented stages included appropriate content, appropriate presenter, and appropriate delivery model. All the teachers interviewed for this study identified career-stage appropriate content as a necessary element of professional learning programs. Nine of the twelve teachers interviewed needed to choose their own topics for study when participating in professional learning. Additionally, nine of the twelve teachers interviewed felt that professional learning should present alternative teaching strategies. Finally, four of the twelve teachers interviewed felt that professional learning should provide printed resources. All the teachers interviewed for this study felt that a career-
A stage-appropriate presenter was a necessary element of professional learning programs; nine of the twelve teachers more specifically needed the presenter of their professional learning to demonstrate credibility. All the teachers interviewed for this study felt that a career-stage appropriate delivery model was a necessary element of professional learning programs, and all twelve of the study participants, regardless of their career stage, felt that an appropriate delivery model included participation. Professional learning that used collaboration was identified by nine of the twelve teachers interviewed as career-stage appropriate. Nine of the twelve teachers interviewed also felt that hands-on activities were a necessary component of an appropriate delivery model. Four of the twelve teachers interviewed needed to share in groups when participating in professional learning. Four of the twelve teachers interviewed believed that attending professional conferences was an appropriate delivery model for professional learning at their career stage.

Discussion

The findings of this study were presented in Chapter 4 and were summarized in the preceding section. Two levels of findings, individual career-stage findings and overarching themes, were discussed in Chapter 4 with regard to career-stage appropriate content, career-stage appropriate presenter, and career-stage appropriate delivery model. The third level of findings, differences in teacher perspectives across different career stages, addressed appropriate content. The purpose of this section is to discuss the major findings in the context of extant literature. Each section below includes (a) an assertion supported by data and (b) comparison of findings with current relevant literature.
Teachers felt that career-stage appropriate professional learning offered choice of topics. Nine of the teachers interviewed for this study wanted to choose the content of their professional learning, rather than endure professional learning based on information they had previously heard. These nine teachers needed content that they considered new and relevant. With respect to the apprentice teachers, two of them stated that they willingly attended required professional learning because they felt they needed anything that would help them in the classroom. As apprentice teachers, they had little previous experience with professional learning, and they considered much of the information presented in mandatory learning sessions new and relevant. To the apprentice teachers, the term new referred to material that was new to them, such as inductions programs, teaching models, curriculum guides, and effective classroom management strategies. When given the option of choosing professional learning, the apprentice teachers chose topics that met just-in-time needs, such as classroom management, technology training, or local school procedures. They preferred that this content be presented in documents so that they could refer to them often and avoid being overwhelmed by having to remember too much information.

The topics that the apprentice teachers chose reflected their insecurity about the quality of their job performance and their desire to do their jobs correctly. Even though they were credentialed, the apprentice teachers did not feel successful in the classroom, and they wanted information that they could immediately take back to their classrooms to help them become competent teachers. To them, competency translated as an ability to conduct a smooth class with well-behaved students. The apprentice teachers were also open to learning alternative teaching strategies. These findings reflect the research
discussed by Steffy et al. (2000), which showed that apprentice teachers worked toward integrating and synthesizing knowledge, pedagogy, and confidence: “Teachers at this career stage are filled with energy and anticipation. Teachers at the apprentice phase may yet be unsure of their skills. They want to learn more and are willing to try new strategies” (pp. 6-7). Joyce, Showers, and Calhoun (2000) reinforced apprentice teachers’ need for integrating such new strategies in Models of Teaching, noting that “the chief problem is integrating the new skill into existing patterns of behavior” (p. 439).

At this point, transfer becomes important: “Classically, transfer refers to the effect of learning one kind of material or skill, or the ability to learn something new” (p. 438). When practice of one kind of skill increases one’s ability to learn another, transfer is occurring. In the case of teaching strategies, vertical transfer must take place: “Vertical transfer involves substantial differences in content so that new learning has to take place as the skill is transferred to the work situation: “The additional learning has to occur in the work setting” (p. 439). The findings of this study illustrate what Fuller and Brown (1975) discovered using their “Teacher Concerns Questionnaire”: beginning teachers were concerned with their ability to deliver material. To them, completing a lesson plan as it was planned constituted a successful day in the classroom. Apprentice teachers focused on developing their delivery technique; therefore, classroom management became a critical issue. Any disruption in the classroom prevented the apprentice teacher from delivering the lesson as originally designed; this frustration created the need for effective classroom discipline strategies. This finding also supports Frances Fuller’s assertion that apprentice teachers are most concerned with their performance, not their students’ learning. At this stage of their careers, the connection
between classroom discipline and student achievement was not the focus of apprentice teachers.

Interestingly, the term *new* had a slightly different meaning for each represented career stage. To the professional teachers, *new* also referred to alternative teaching strategies. However, unlike the apprentice teachers who often struggled to find a strategy that worked with their students, the professional teachers looked for additional successful strategies. While it was true that the professional teachers wanted information to take back and use immediately, they wanted to know beforehand that the strategy would work with their students. So, professional learning content had to include exploration of data in published studies of programs in schools similar to the participants’ local teaching environment and student population. Like the apprentice teachers, the professional teachers chose to have information written down. They were interested in two kinds of printed information. One was review material. If the content had been previously presented, the professional teachers preferred a handout to which they could refer when they needed to refresh their memories instead of sitting through seemingly endless and useless repetition. Printed material was considered especially appropriate for procedural information or teacher resources. Mostly, professional teachers wanted huge packets of material to replicate so they could implement the content immediately; consequently, they were also adamant about choosing their professional learning.

Already feeling competent, the professional teachers needed content to expand their repertoires. Secure in their teaching skills, professional teachers were willing to take risks and try something new. They were not worried about making mistakes because they had strong basic teaching skills. After all, they had a reliable bag of tricks to access.
Professional teachers also chose classes that involved exchanging ideas with other participants, and they valued sharing classroom anecdotes. The findings of this study support Steffy et al.’s (2000) research, which demonstrated that professional teachers “begin to look beyond the classroom, seeing themselves and their colleagues as part of a broader profession. Professional teachers . . . use a variety of professional-development opportunities for continued growth” (p. 8). Whereas the apprentice teachers sought to learn from teachers, professional teachers sought to trade learning with teachers.

From the perspective of expert teachers, the term new also referred to alternative teaching strategies. Like the professional teachers interviewed for this study, the expert teachers looked for additional successful strategies to increase their repertoires. They wanted to learn from other teachers who had already experienced success with the strategies. So, like their peers, the expert teachers wanted their professional learning content to include reports of data published in studies of programs in place at schools similar to the participants’ local teaching environment and student population. Even though the expert teachers were secure in their teaching abilities and tended to take professional risks in their classroom practices, these teachers were not willing to field test unsubstantiated strategies. This unwillingness was not based in a fear of personal failure; rather, it was based in their desire to make every moment of class time an effective teaching moment. The expert teachers possessed a level of skill that seamlessly blended both efficiency and effectiveness, without sacrificing either. From the point of view of the expert teachers, the term new referred not only to alternative teaching strategies but also to cutting-edge material that was new to the profession. They wanted to be on top of new trends, new terminology, and new strategies. Their interest in the latest, most current
information was generated by their desire for continued professional growth. The experts already knew they were outstanding teachers, but they were excited about becoming even better at what they did. This excitement emerged from their intrinsic love of personal learning, and they felt that their learning potential was endless. In addition, they were interested in new insight to their content. To one of the expert teachers, *new* implied material beyond the common scope of the subject area for a particular grade level. Even if she would not learn something to take directly back to her students, she felt the expanded knowledge base that professional learning afforded her increased her effectiveness. According to Steffy et al. (2000), expert teachers are “committed to the newest and best ideas in the profession, . . . taking great pride in maintaining cutting-edge expertise” (pp. 8-9). This pride was demonstrated by teachers at the professional and expert career-stages because they wanted to choose their own professional learning based on their own assessments of their needs, not what was dictated to them.

In summary, this study supports research indicating that teachers choose new, relevant content as career-stage appropriate professional development. One of the early researchers of adult learning was Rogers (1969), who demonstrated that significant learning addresses the needs and wants of the learner. Such learning was characterized by personal involvement, was self-initiated and evaluated by the learner, and affected the behavior of the learner. Teachers’ choosing new, relevant content for professional learning is a reflection of these characteristics. According to Knowles (1978), adult learners are motivated to learn those things for which they see a need. If they feel a need to study a topic, teachers are more likely to choose to learn about it and will wholeheartedly invest their time and energy. Svinicki (1996) concurred when he indicated that
teachers must feel that the content to be learned is relevant, or they will be unenthusiastic. An unenthusiastic learner will not willingly engage in learning mandated content. Accordingly, adult learners who choose their learning content will succeed in learning it. Further research conducted by Glatthorn (1997) showed that teachers needed to be involved in “two or more” of the following:

1. Intensive development (i.e., mandatory use of the clinical supervision model),
2. Cooperative development (i.e., developmental, socially mediated activities such as peer coaching or action research), or
3. Self-directed development (i.e., developmental activities teachers direct on their own). (p. 170)

Teachers who choose their content direct their own professional development; thus, what they learn is career-stage appropriate. Teachers who participated in this study found that career-stage appropriate professional learning offered choice of topics.

Just as the teachers’ comments reflected the importance of choosing their professional learning topics, the topics they chose aligned with the areas of concern inventoried by Frances Fuller (1969) and later addressed by Huberman (1995). Because beginning teachers tend to be concerned about their performance (i.e., how they teach and how they direct student behavior), the remarks of the apprentice teachers who participated in this study are not surprising. They focused on their behaviors (i.e., to create a functional classroom), with little concern for student learning (i.e., student understanding of class content). Apprentice teachers do not always understand that teaching does not exist in isolation and has little meaning without student learning. Therefore, when the apprentice teachers in this study chose professional learning, they
chose topics or willingly participated in mandatory professional learning that addressed their teacher behaviors. The choices made by the apprentice teachers in this study only demonstrated a direct correlation between teacher concerns and the professional learning they choose. More experienced teachers recognize that successful teaching is not measured by teacher performance. When they ask themselves if their teaching has resulted in learning, the experienced teachers’ area of concern expands to include the effects of their teaching on their students’ learning. This expansion of concerns to include student learning motivates more experienced teachers to choose professional learning topics that focus on increasing student learning. Hence, professional and expert teachers choose to increase their repertoire of teaching strategies proven to be effective. The professional and expert teachers who participated in this study focused on professional growth in order to facilitate student success. One of the expert teachers even went beyond student success; she focused on an even bigger picture: how her students would function in the world as adults. This teacher wanted her students to continue to learn as adults. She perceived continuous learning as a desired behavior for her current students when they reached adulthood. She believed that when she modeled for her students her love of learning, she modeled learning that went beyond her subject and grade level. This motivation for learning was described by Cross (1981) when she identified three sub-groups of adult learners, one of which is learning oriented, those who pursue learning for its own sake: “They seem to possess a fundamental desire to know and to grow through learning, and their activities are constant and lifelong” (pp. 82-83). Teacher awareness of the changes in their concerns reinforces their need to choose their own professional learning; attempting to force a teacher to change is counterproductive. Change cannot be
mandated; it can only be facilitated, and it can only be facilitated if the teacher sees the need for change. As Cross stated, “Meaningless material is poorly retained, it is thought, because older learners have no reason or motivation to learn it and no way to organize it and connect it to previously stored material” (p. 163). According to Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, and Hall (1998), these concerns guide the interventions teachers choose, and these interventions, often in the form of professional learning, guide and support the teachers as they develop:

Concerns do not exist in a vacuum. Concerns are influenced by participants’ feelings about an innovation, by their perception of the ability to use it, by the setting in which the change occurs, by the number of other changes in which they are involved and, most of all, by the kind of support and assistance they receive as they attempt to implement change. (p. 43)

In 1974, Hord et al. in association with the University of Texas created their “Concerns Questionnaire.” The purpose of the questionnaire was to identify the concerns people have during the course of adopting innovations. Once concerns are identified, they can be addressed through various methods of support, including professional learning when appropriate. This correlates to one of Knowles’ (1978) assumptions about adult learning, that adults tend to have a problem-centered orientation to learning:

The adult comes into an educational activity largely because he is experiencing some inadequacy in coping with current life problems. He wants to apply tomorrow what he learns today, so his time perspective is one of immediacy of application. Therefore, he enters into education with a problem-centered orientation to learning (p. 58).
Furthermore, the content of teacher supervision protocols tended to reflect teachers’ career stages. Just as new teachers most often participate in required professional learning, they also frequently need a more structured form of supervision. Glickman et al. (2001) presented this correlation in his discussion of clinical supervision. It appears that the purpose of teacher evaluations has evolved from monitoring teacher performance to monitoring student achievement, just as the understanding of teacher growth has evolved.

*Teachers felt that career-stage appropriate professional learning was delivered by a credible presenter.* Nine of the twelve teachers interviewed needed the presenter of their professional learning to demonstrate credibility. Presenters could earn their credibility in various ways. For instance, they could be published, well-known keynote speakers who were credible because they demonstrated broad and deep content knowledge when they spoke. They could also be working professionals or specialists in the content area (e.g., a theatre lighting practitioner who could demonstrate lighting techniques). Ten of the twelve study participants found the best way for a presenter to earn credibility was to have personal classroom experience because this experience indicated an understanding of the demands and expectations of the teaching profession. In this situation, presenters and participants alike understood current issues, current kids, and current schools. The teachers trusted these presenters because they had on-the-job experience and knew content worked because they had used it. The data indicated that teachers also wanted this person to be open about the realities facing the classroom teacher. The findings of this study that teachers can and even prefer to learn from other teachers concur with Blase and Blase’s (2006) findings presented in *Teachers Bringing*
According to Blase and Blase, the first and second sources of teacher help are principals and lead teachers, respectively. When acting as the instructional supervisor, the principal uses a formal, top-down framework because the help is often directed by the principal with little or no input from the teacher. The relationship between the administrator and the teacher is based upon power of position because the boss is instructing the employee. The trend of utilizing lead teachers to help guide teacher performance is a positive move away from top-down leadership toward peer leadership, since the lead teacher often is or was a classroom teacher. This structure offers more exchange of ideas between a lead teacher and a classroom teacher than there is between an administrator and a teacher. However, the lead teacher is still seen as the expert and the teacher is still seen as the learner. When acting as lead teachers, these peers still represent administrative influence because they continue to function in a formal framework. Blase and Blase (2006) asserted that the best form of teacher help occurs in a natural, informal framework. Teachers learn best when they help one another through peer consultation because they establish a relationship built upon communication, care, and trust. Peer consultation is also effective because it focuses on developing skills in planning and organization, showing and sharing, classroom management, and culminates with what Blase and Blase claimed to be peer consultation at its best: teachers teaching teachers.

Other research also confirms that teachers regard experienced educators as career-stage appropriate presenters. In *Freedom to Learn*, Rogers (1960) defined two types of learning: cognitive and experiential. Experiential learning addresses applied knowledge, which would include learning new teaching strategies in order to use them in the
classroom. Because experiential learning addresses the needs and wants of the learner, logic follows that a presenter who is an experienced teacher will be able to understand the needs and wants of other teachers and address those needs and wants when delivering professional learning. Furthermore, Knowles (1978) suggested that adult learning should relate to an adult’s previous experiences. If facilitators and professional learning participants all have teaching experiences, they can identify with each other when they relate similar teaching experiences. Knowles (1980) proposed four basic assumptions of adult learning, one of which is that adults possess valuable experiential knowledge that should be used in the learning situation. A presenter who is an experienced teacher can share personal accounts of professional incidents; as a result, the presenter is no longer the detached sage but someone on common ground with the participants. This connection promotes mutual sharing, the outcome of which is new information. Zepeda (2003) also asserted that teachers gain more from professional learning when experienced teachers facilitate this learning when she indicated that “adult learners are more motivated to take risks if they feel support” (p. 137). A professional learning environment that includes interactions among participants and a credible presenter creates a supportive adult-learning atmosphere. Included in this environment is mutual trust and respect between teachers and their instructors founded upon the credibility of the instructors. The comments of this study’s participants indicated that teachers prefer experienced teachers to facilitate professional learning experiences.

* Teachers felt that career-stage appropriate professional learning included participation. Nearly all the study participants were unyielding in their rejection of lecture as a main delivery model. Interestingly, the apprentice teachers interviewed were
the only exception to this trend. Although they acknowledged lecture as acceptable, they felt that it was appropriate only when the content of the professional learning was focused on explanations of policies and procedures or introductory material on new information (e.g., a tardy policy that has established guidelines, a guest speaker, or a textbook adoption). Even then, all the teachers interviewed believed that small doses of lecture were more appropriate than large doses. Other research has shown that career-stage appropriate professional learning contains minimal lecture. According to Downey et al. (2004), exclusively using lecture assumes that one method of content delivery suits the needs of all professional learning participants. Clearly, this assumption is false because different adults have different preferred learning styles, just as children do (Knowles, 1980). In addition, Knowles’s theory of andragogy emphasized the adult learners’ need to direct their own learning, tap their experience, solve real-life problems, and implement new knowledge. Lecture, because it is completely instructor-oriented, meets none of these needs. The teachers in this study believed that participating in their professional learning was more fun and more interesting and further believed that becoming and staying interested in new material was easier when they could be actively engaged in their learning. The apprentice teachers felt that participating in active professional learning experiences gave them stress-free opportunities to ask questions they would not have asked on their own. The teachers in this study felt that engaging in discussions, through collaborating, exploring, sharing, or disagreeing, was a highly effective participatory delivery method of professional learning. One teacher even felt that she learned more through discussion. In addition to group discussions, another form of effective discussion was addressed by Blase and Blase (2006), who identified peer
coaching as an effective method for encouraging group learning. This method can be organized by teams or partnerships that would regularly observe and discuss one another’s teaching and learn from watching one another and the students. Additionally, Joyce et al. (2000), who has repeatedly demonstrated that teachers’ professional learning cannot occur without coaching, recommended that all faculties be divided into coaching teams, resulting in all personnel seeing themselves as coaches. This “coaching environment” has three major functions:

1. Provision of companionship
2. Analysis of application (extending executive control and attaining “deep” meaning
3. Adaptation to the students. (pp. 440-441)

Not only does discussion yield more learning, but it also expands the learner’s social opportunities, which Cross (1980) stated is another reason that adults seek active-learning. Nine of the teachers believed that active participation in the form of hands-on activities was a career-stage appropriate delivery model. These teachers wanted to experiment with new activities, to figure out how they worked, and to fumble through this process in the company of other teachers doing the same things because this experimental environment encouraged social interaction and created a comfort zone where making mistakes was seen as an occasion for learning. The teachers wanted to “make and take” manipulatives that they could use immediately in their classrooms because they wanted to have the chance to practice and to discover “how it worked.” As a result, they felt they learned more with this hands-on approach than they could sitting and listening to someone talk and give information. Four of the twelve teachers interviewed
believed attending professional conferences was an appropriate delivery model for professional learning at their career stage because their intentional selection of and attendance at specific sessions provided a variety of delivery models, presenters, and related content. The teachers who attended conferences enjoyed being immersed in a community of professionals with the same interests. The findings of this study reflect Guskey’s suggestion that there are many processes and activities recognized as effective professional learning delivery models (Reitzug, 2002). The findings of this study suggest that active participation belongs on that list.

Research data support the conclusion that career-stage appropriate professional learning is best delivered through active engagement. According to Svinicki (1996), “faculty members’ learning about teaching is just as subject to the principles of learning as is their students’ learning about content” (p. 4). When adult learners are given the opportunity to share their own learning experiences through active engagement, they are enthusiastic about their learning. This theory was supported by Levinson et al. (1978) and Sheehy (1976), who demonstrated that when these criteria are met, learning becomes fun and satisfying for adults because active engagement incorporates the various characteristics of authentic learning: “ownership, appropriateness, structure, collaboration, internalization, reflection, and motivation” (p. 135). Glatthorn (1990) also reaffirmed the value of active learning when he said, “As active learners, teachers need to construct their own meanings based on what they do and experience; thus, learning is an active meaning-making process” (p. 6). It is safe to conclude from this study and others that utilizing a delivery model centered on active engagement appropriately meets the professional learning needs of teachers at various career stages.
The findings of this study lead to three conclusions:

1. For teachers, career-stage appropriate professional learning includes a choice of topics.

2. For teachers, career-stage appropriate professional learning should be delivered by a credible presenter.

3. For teachers, career-stage appropriate professional learning includes active participation and coaching.

As demonstrated by this study, these conclusions reflect the learning needs of teachers at all career stages as described by the participants in this study, yet there are several other dimensions of adult development that should be considered when designing and facilitating effective teacher learning, dimensions that are beyond the scope of this study but that warrant further research in concert with the findings reported here. In other words, the literature on adult learning theory is not the only body of knowledge that professional learning specialists need to consider when creating and facilitating career-stage appropriate teacher learning. For example, it is necessary to understand other dimensions of adult development since they can affect a teacher’s career stage, including stage development, stage development, life cycle development, transition events, role development, and the role of gender in adult development (Glickman et al., 2001, p. 63). Stage development theories focus on “adults’ orderly progression toward increasing maturity and complexity, and tend to focus on systematic internal changes in thinking and orientation as individuals mature” (Glickman et al., 2001, p. 63). In the field of stage development, Piaget (1955) identified four stages of cognitive development ranging from children (sensorimotor and preoperational) to adults (concrete operations and formal
operations). Another realm of development is moral growth as explored by Kohlberg and Armon (1984), who identified “three broad categories of morality: the preconventional level, the conventional level, and the postconventional level” (Glickman et al., 2001, p. 66). Hunt (1966) created a cognitive development continuum ranging from the low conceptual level stage (concrete thinking) to the high conceptual level stage (highly abstract thinking).

Another area that needs to be explored is ego development and its relationship to career-stages and appropriate professional learning. Loevinger (1976) identified ten stages of ego development. People in the lower stages rely more on others, people in the middle stages rely on conventional behaviors, and people in the higher stages act autonomously (Glickman et al., 2001, p. 68). Levine (1987) took a unique approach to adult development when he defined ego development theory from the study of women. Robert Kegan (1994) explored levels of consciousness and how individuals come to envision and understand the world but focused on the adolescent and adult stages, which he referred to as the durable category (Glickman et al., 2001. p. 69). Certainly the impact of adult-stage development should be considered when designing appropriate professional learning for career teachers.

Another area of adult growth focuses on age-linked life cycle development and addresses patterns of movement that all adults experience as they live. There is a growing body of literature that focuses on the links between teacher development and transition issues related to the adult lifespan. Understanding the relationship between teacher development and transition issues would include exploring the work of Buhler (1956) (i.e., goal phases), Erikson (1950) (i.e., critical issues), and Levinson et al. (1978) (i.e.
stability vs. transition). These areas also include the effects of critical events such as marriage, child-birth, and widowhood because they are anticipated to occur around certain ages; the effects of historical events such as World War II and the Depression because they affected large numbers of people; and the effects of unanticipated events such as divorce, unemployment, and unexpected illness (Glickman et al., 2001, p. 77).

The most recent area of discussion involves social role development, which can also be explored with regard to its effect on adult development and considered when creating and providing appropriate professional learning. Juhasz (1989) studied the roles of family, work, and self when he examined the interacting roles of adult lives such as career, family life, and personal development. Merriam and Clark (1991) conducted similar studies involving love and work and their effects on learning. In these studies, people charted their life patterns, using two separate lines to show the ups and downs in these two domains of life. As this brief review of adult development illustrates, creating career-stage appropriate professional learning goes far beyond only meeting adult learning needs. The various types of adult development can also affect career stages, and career stages affect teachers’ perspectives of appropriate professional learning. Therefore, the idea that career-stage appropriate professional learning should only address adult learning needs is too simplistic to assume.

Implications

Through continued teaching and learning, schools can become more effective, especially when school leaders support the growth process by addressing the unique learning needs of teachers operating at different career stages. The participants in this study were clear in their descriptions of the kinds of content, presenter, and delivery that
they believed best impacted their learning. Teachers’ perspectives of career-stage appropriate professional learning revealed by this study have implications for K-12 professional learning specialists. The findings also suggest the need for further research.

**Implications for Professional Learning Specialists**

Lecture and “sit and get” professional learning experiences are efficient delivery methods when teachers only need access to information. They are often used in system-wide teacher induction programs for large groups of first year teachers and cover topics that include classroom management, employee benefits, teacher ethics, and other areas that pertain to all new teachers. Many times, the most important purpose for these events is to be able to document that they have occurred. In the local school environment, lecture might be used to introduce a new initiative in order to guarantee whole-faculty awareness of an innovation. They do not involve interaction because their purpose is to dispense the most information in the least amount of time to the greatest number of people. However, data from this study as revealed through teacher comments reflect that participants in the apprentice, professional, and expert stages of their teaching careers did not believe that the lecture delivery method met their professional learning needs. These teachers needed more than exposure to new information, so presenting this information through an engaging medium would increase learning. Teachers interviewed for this study noted that when lecture is the only action that occurs in teacher induction, new teachers already begin to sense that they are losing their identity, becoming mere faces in the crowd who are not important enough to have personalized learning opportunities. Their isolation begins as induction becomes indoctrination. Also, induction programs are often the first formal exposure a teacher has to a new school system. Lecture is not the
best method of teaching to model for these new teachers. Beginners need to learn information, practice it, and develop skills, turning that information into working knowledge used to increase student achievement. The obvious implication for professional learning specialists is to close the gap between knowing what effective teaching is and doing it.

Malcolm Knowles’s research on adult learning was based on andragogy, adult learning theory. Knowles recognized that adults needed to own their learning because they had the ability to reflect upon their practice, determine their own learning needs, and even develop their own learning strategies. Regardless of career stage, the interviewed teachers in this study were capable of determining what they needed to know. Even apprentice teachers with only minutes of classroom experience were painfully aware of what they had not learned in college. They were already able to identify personal areas of concern or weakness. Professional learning specialists need to permit teachers to identify their needs and concerns and choose their professional learning accordingly.

Carl Rogers (1969) identified two types of learning, cognitive and experiential. Ideally, teachers convert experiential learning into daily practice. But first, learning experiences need to be authentic. Student teaching, in retrospect, seems like playing dress-up; practicing in an established classroom does not prepare fledgling teachers to establish their own classroom. Rogers’s work relates to this study because designers of professional learning and teacher trainers should work together to create a more practical and realistic transition from college into the work force. A year-long apprenticeship in which new teachers could actually share responsibility for a classroom in a co-teaching situation before being put solely in charge of their own classroom would seem to be a
logical direction to take teacher education. An apprenticeship would also provide a master teacher after whom a new teacher could model his or her behavior.

Knowles (1980) later acknowledged that the differences between adults and children as learners may be a matter of degree and situation rather than a complete separation. Perhaps professional learning specialists and teacher trainers should focus on the similar learning needs of children and adults. Knowles’s work relates to this study because qualities of effective teaching for children also exist in effective teaching for adults. This awareness compels professional learning specialists to design and implement teacher learning opportunities that apply best practices. These basic practices are fundamental to effective, valuable teaching and learning for all learners, suggesting that professional learning specialists should engage in the same purposeful planning and execution of lessons for adults as teachers do for children. Best practices for adult learning provide for individual learner interests and learning styles just as they do for children. After initial exposure to participant-chosen new material by a credible presenter, effective adult learning environments could foster active participation involving collaborative, hands-on, and sharing activities as determined useful by the participants.

The most recent literature on school improvement encourages job-embedded professional learning. The American Federation of Teachers (2004) proposed that teachers should individually and collectively examine and improve their practice and that professional learning should be job-embedded and site-specific. In schools that provide such an environment, the learning is integrated in a teacher’s daily work. Some examples of this type of learning include critical friends groups, school coaching, study groups,
lesson study, and action research (Easton, 2004). Another way to provide job-embedded professional learning is through the creation of professional learning communities (PLCs). The premise upon which PLCs are based is that schools are communities of learners. Mike Schmoker (2004) cited “a broad, even remarkable concurrence” among educational researchers and organizational theorists who have concluded that developing the capacity of educators to function as members of professional learning communities is the “best-known means by which we might achieve truly historic, wide-scale improvements in teaching and learning” (p. 432). The most noteworthy emphasis of a professional learning community is that it encourages shared thinking among teachers, as opposed to the individual instructional decisions that teachers make when thinking in isolation (Roberts & Pruitt, 2003). This shared thinking is possible when teachers regularly work collaboratively to help students learn.

The findings of this study have largely confirmed the extant research on adult learners and professional learning. The findings have also reinforced the importance of meeting the learning needs of teachers at the apprentice, professional, and expert stages of their careers. Yet the participants in this study indicated through their reflections that even though they fall into labeled career stages, they also have individual needs. This study demonstrates that there is no one recipe for professional learning that creates a learning experience that meets the needs of all learners, even within the same career stage. Newer teachers could need the guidance of their supervisors to help them identify strengths, weaknesses, and plans of improvement. More experienced teachers are likely better equipped to self-evaluate. However, the data suggest that for professional learning to be most effective, each teacher would design all aspects of his or her professional
learning experience, based on his or her multiple dimensions of development.

Furthermore, this study indicates is that, regardless of career stage, the teachers interviewed took pride in the excellence of their performance; indeed, they chose to participate in professional learning to improve their knowledge and skills at each level. The apprentice teachers interviewed wanted to improve their management skills, while the professional and expert teachers wanted to broaden their content knowledge and teaching strategies. One expert teacher looked beyond improving classroom teaching; she wanted to extend her subject knowledge outside of the context of her teaching assignment. Finally, this study demonstrates that teachers regard their peers as professionals possessing valuable insight: they seek to participate in professional learning facilitated by teachers, just as they seek to participate in professional learning with teachers. Teachers seek these learning opportunities in formal classes, workshops, and conferences, as well as through observation, coaching, and conversation. In summary, they value each others’ knowledge and expertise.

Implications for Future Research

The teachers interviewed indicated that they needed new, relevant, research-based content that they chose to learn. They also needed credible practitioners, most often experienced teachers, to deliver this content. Finally, they needed active engagement in their learning. Although this study included the perspectives of apprentice, professional, and expert teachers, further study could address the other career stages (novice, distinguished, and emeritus) identified by Steffy et al. (2000). The perspectives of novice, distinguished, and emeritus teachers on career-stage appropriate professional learning would help with the design and implementation of appropriate professional learning for
all career teachers. Researching teachers’ professional needs at all stages would provide a
general blueprint for responding to these needs. Listening and responding to the input of
all teachers when planning professional learning would strengthen their learning, student
learning, and the teaching profession.

Research on school improvement in recent years has led educational systems to
incorporate successful business strategies in an effort to increase student achievement.
One belief in business is that the customer is always right. That belief may also hold true
for education. Although parents, students, and society have been identified as the
customers of education, in reality, the first customer of education may well be the
teacher. Furthermore, teacher training must first accommodate teacher needs before it
can meet student needs. The work of Carl Rogers, Patricia Cross, and Malcolm Knowles,
which addressed the needs of the adult learner, has been in existence for decades.
However, the design and implementation of formal professional learning frequently does
not reflect the research on how and why adults learn. If ignoring learning needs is
inappropriate when teaching children, it is also inappropriate when teaching adults. This
negligence results in little or no adult learning and fosters a lack of professionalism in
teachers. They feel that they are not important enough to be treated as individuals or
professionals. As a result, many teachers might leave the profession for a more fulfilling
environment (Glickman et al., 2001). Even worse, they might attempt to teach their
students in the same way. Future research could focus on ways to help teachers at all
stages of career and adult development design their own professional learning. In this
way, professional learning experiences could meet the needs of all teachers.
Another task for future research would be to examine how other professions train and maintain their workforce and then create a model for the teaching profession. As one participant in the study revealed, the large company for which she worked one summer designed professional learning based on employee reviews. Specific deficiencies were addressed for each employee, and appropriate learning was provided and required. As part of the employee reviews, the supervisor articulated employee needs, made plans, provided resources, and established time lines in collaboration with the employees. In this way, the employees took ownership of their professional growth. All contributions were acknowledged, just as Malcolm Knowles would have suggested. Research needs to be conducted by members of the teaching profession to see whether and how this continuous improvement model could be adapted for use in schools. Specifically, the issue of the use of time in the school day could be researched. Unfortunately, schools cannot be shut down while professional learning occurs. As a result, substitute teachers must be hired to assume the teacher’s professional responsibilities. Because frequent or extended teacher absences create an unstable learning environment for students, teacher professional learning generally takes place before or after school; however, after school, teachers are sometimes too tired to focus on new learning.

History shows that the intent and practice of professional learning has changed over time. Professional learning was initially used to develop a standard quality of teaching (Glickman et al., 2001). A teacher who demonstrated certain skills met a standard defined by a checklist of behavioral characteristics. Teacher quality was literally measured by a teacher’s classroom performance. The purpose of professional learning has evolved from this exclusive focus on the teacher to include the student. Teacher
effectiveness is now measured by increased student achievement. The traditional
delivery model of professional learning does not meet the current goals of professional
learning. Given its lack of success and what educators know about adult learning theory
and adult development, one must question why the traditional model of professional
learning still exists. Is the attraction to the traditional model its cost effectiveness, its ease
of implementation, and its ease of documentation? If so, the traditional model is a
successful management strategy rather than an effective learning protocol.

Finding the answers to these questions necessitates future research. Thus, another
relevant question arises. What changes to the traditional model of professional learning
need to be made to reflect adult learning theory, adult development, and increase student
achievement? Because professional learning affects students, further research could help
reveal how professional learning specialists could design and implement professional
learning to increase student achievement. This study shows that teacher input when
designing individual professional learning would address individual needs at different
career and developmental stages. Further research could explore how this individualized
approach could be launched. Plans for implementing incremental change to the
traditional model of professional learning could be explored.

In summary, the implications of this research for professional learning specialists
are that teachers in the apprentice, professional, and expert stages of their professional
careers need more than exposure to new information that they get through lecture and “sit
and get.” They need to learn information and develop related skills for the purpose of
increasing student achievement. Teachers at the apprentice, professional, and expert
stages of their careers believe that career-stage appropriate professional learning takes
place when they are actively engaged in their learning. The limited focus of his study, teachers’ perspectives of career-stage appropriate professional learning, also raises the question of how adult development impacts those perspectives. This finding also implies the need to discover why andragogy has been ignored when planning and implementing professional learning. Identifying and understanding these reasons can counteract this trend and encourage the inclusion of adult learning theory and knowledge of adult development when creating professional learning programs. Although teachers do form a unique community, they are also members of the adult community. Because teachers are adults, studying other areas of adult development could produce an even deeper understanding of appropriate professional learning for teachers at various career stages.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I, ______________________, agree to participate in a research study titled “Teachers’ Perspectives of Career-Stage Appropriate Professional Learning” conducted by Anna Rinaldi from the Department of Educational Leadership and Lifelong Learning at the University of Georgia (706-542-4158) under the direction of Dr. Joseph Blasé (706-613-8226). I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate. I can stop taking part without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The reason for this study is to describe teachers’ perceptions of the effectiveness of professional learning as it addresses their self-determined career stages and their individual needs. If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

1) Participate in two, audiotaped, face-to-face interviews with the researcher. One interview will take place before the professional learning begins, and another will take place at the end of the professional learning. These interviews will take place at a mutually agreeable location. Each interview will take 1-2 hours.
2) Complete a participant journal reflecting on my feelings about and reactions to professional learning activities during this course. I will enter a minimum of three journal reflections of a minimum of 150 words each.
3) Agree to be observed for about 20 minutes in one of my professional learning courses.

I will not benefit directly from this research. However, my participation in this research may lead to information that could benefit teachers, as individuals and as an educational community. The results of this study may guide professional learning specialists in the designing, planning, and implementation of professional learning to ensure opportunities that teachers perceive as having professional relevance to them at their individual career stages.

No personally identifying information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission, unless otherwise required by law. I understand that personally identifying information is to be kept confidential, all proper names in the transcripts of my interviews will be replaced with a pseudonym and the audiotapes will be erased by 09/31/2006.
No discomforts or stresses are expected, but if any questions make me uncomfortable, I may pass on them.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone (770-446-9001) or email (agrinaldi@comcast.net).

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

__________________________________  ________________________  __________
Name of Researcher               Signature         Date

__________________________________  ________________________  __________
Name of Participant               Signature         Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

For additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant, please call or write: The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-mail Address IRB@uga.edu.
APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Life-Cycle Career Phase____________________

Volunteer #_____

(All responses will be kept confidential.)

Name________________________________

Personal email address ______________________________

Personal phone number _______________________________

Pseudonym ___________________________

Gender _______

Age _______

Level of Teaching Certificate _______

Total Years Teaching Experience _______

Current Grade Level Taught ________________________

Current Subject(s) Taught __________________________

Years in Current Teaching Assignment ______

Years at Current School ______

This is my first formal professional learning experience. YES / NO

Reason for Participating in This Professional Learning __________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX C

THE LIFE CYCLE OF THE CAREER TEACHER

The Life Cycle of the Career Teacher is a developmental model that proposes and describes an ongoing process that takes place throughout the life cycle of a teaching career (Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch, & Enz, 2000). The model views growth as unfolding in a sequential pattern and the individual as an active participant in his or her own development. In the Life Cycle of the Career Teacher model, each of the six phases is content and task specific and exists along the continuum of excellent teaching across the career. There are no poor/bad phases.

Please read the description of each phase of the life-cycle of the career teacher before choosing the phase you feel most accurately and currently describes you. Write your choice in the space provided on the Demographic Questionnaire.

Novice Teacher (does not apply to this study) – involves only practicum, field experience, or student teachers, also referred to as pre-service teachers.

Apprentice Teacher – begins for most teachers when they receive responsibility for planning and delivering instruction on their own. Teachers at this career phase are filled with energy and anticipation. Notwithstanding feelings of self-doubt, many love teaching and believe they have the skills to assure that all children will achieve at high levels. Apprentice teachers tend to be idealistic. Though teachers at the apprentice phase may yet be unsure of their skills, they are passionate about helping students succeed. They must learn how to achieve their high ideals.

Professional Teacher – The professional phase emerges as teachers grow in their self-confidence as educators. Student feedback plays a critical role in this process. Students’ respect for teachers and teachers’ respect for students form the bedrock foundation upon which this stage is built. Students view professional teachers as patient, kind, understanding, and helpful. In turn, these teachers view themselves as student advocates. These teachers are competent, solid, and dependable. Most view themselves as classroom teachers with no aspirations to become administrators. These teachers are happiest when interacting with students. Professional teachers most frequently seek help and assistance from other teachers. Professional teachers actively participate in a collegial network for support and guidance. They begin to look beyond the classroom, seeing themselves and their colleagues as part of a broader professional. Professional teachers value opportunities to observe colleagues’ innovative practices.

Expert Teacher – The expert phase symbolizes achievement of the high standards. Even if they do not formally seek it, these teachers meet the expectations required for national certification. Expert teachers anticipate student responses, modifying and adjusting
instruction to promote growth. Teachers at this level competently support, facilitate, and nurture growth and development of all students, regardless of their backgrounds or ability levels. Students feel safe in the environment of mutual respect these teachers create. Students know exactly what is expected of them, and most behave accordingly. Expert teachers are able to reflect on their practice, facilitating growth and change. They learn through their roles as teachers and community leaders. These teachers understand that students are inclined to learn.

**Distinguished Teacher** – The distinguished phase is reserved for teachers truly gifted in their field. They exceed current expectations for what teachers are expected to know and do. These teachers are the “pied pipers” of the profession. Distinguished teachers impact education-related decisions at city, state, and national levels.

**Emeritus Teacher** – The emeritus phase marks a lifetime of achievement in education. For some, leaving their career is an end; for others, it marks a new beginning. Some move into administrative positions; others pursue new beginnings in higher education. These teachers have formally retired but, because of their expertise and devotion, continue to contribute to the profession.