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Professional Development Among Brigham Young University Faculty

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is a qualitative research study examining views of faculty at Brigham Young University regarding professional development at the university level. Subjects who participated in the study were selected based on being full-time, part-time, adjunct, tenured, and non-tenured professors at Brigham Young University. Instructors who work solely with online students were not included. The contacts also did not include student teachers, support staff, non-teaching faculty or graduate students.

The key findings from the qualitative research study report that faculty differentiate between two categories of professional development, the first is concerned with teaching and other aspects of working at a university, and the second is the development and continuing training in their original field or specialty. Additionally, the research shows that while time is the most commonly cited reason for not attending professional development, it is possible to potentially offer incentives to overcome that barrier to attendance. Professional development activities that are created in an informal manner and are more localized to smaller units within the university—a college, a department, even a subset of a department—seem to be more meaningful to faculty than traditional formally organized professional development by the university.

The overall conclusion from this qualitative research study is that professional development activities should be more flexible and adaptive to the maturation of needs of the intended participants. The current initial professional development at Brigham Young University is viewed positively as being very helpful; however, the longer faculty stay at the university the more they seek out informal professional development focused on specific issues for which they are not finding assistance.

The implication of this study is when universities focus on initial professional development for new faculty often professional development opportunities for mid-career faculty are not emphasized or arranged. Ways to address this gap may include specifically labeling activities like seminars as professional development and then increasing resources devoted to them or giving faculty an allowance per person per year and allowing them to choose how to invest that allowance – either in more training within the teaching profession or within their specific discipline.

Keywords: professional development, Brigham Young University, qualitative research

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Professional development for improving teaching among university faculty has undergone profound changes as the profession adapts to more students with a greater variety of needs and backgrounds being admitted to universities (Andres & Carpenter, 1997). From its roots as a summer program to help part-time teachers develop the pedagogical skills needed (Labaree, 2008) to the modern version which offers a variety of options covering a vast number of pedagogical specialties, professional development has played an integral role in shaping the teaching profession.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Teaching and Learning International Survey, a multinational study of teachers and teaching environments, professional development is broadly defined as: "activities that develop an individual's skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher" (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2009, p. 51). There are many approaches to professional development at the university level (OECD, 2009). Some of these approaches include attending skills courses, workshops, conferences, or seminars; obtaining or updating educational qualifications; networking; doing peer observations; active mentoring; conducting research, both individualized and collaborative; and engaging with professional literature.

The primary purpose of teaching-focused professional development is to ensure that faculty are knowledgeable about the latest pedagogical methodologies and best teaching practices (Gaff & Simpson, 1994). This trend towards teaching-focused professional development has occurred at the university level as more faculty enter the teaching profession from diverse backgrounds (Ying, 2017).

New faculty at Brigham Young University are provided with initial professional development before and during their first semester teaching through the Center for Teaching and Learning (Center for Teaching and Learning, 2017a). They are also notified periodically about additional professional development opportunities through the Faculty Center, their individual colleges, as well as the university itself. The initial professional development conducted by the Center for Teaching and Learning ensures that all faculty have encountered formal professional development at the university level. This makes the population ideal for study because there is at least 1 shared experience of professional development, and likely multiple common experiences as the Center for Teaching and Learning conducts follow-up training (Center for Teaching and Learning, 2017a). Given the ideal commonality of experience, the population of Brigham Young University faculty is suited to a qualitative research study (Pew Research Center, 2017). This thesis seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What professional development activities do Brigham Young University faculty participate in while working for the university, and what past professional development activities have faculty participated in?

2. What are the opinions of Brigham Young University faculty on their experiences with professional development? How effective do they feel it is?

3. How can universities improve professional development opportunities for faculty?

The purpose of this study is to understand faculty attitudes about and experiences with professional development in a qualitative manner.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

This literature review summarizes different types of professional development at the university level and gives concrete examples of how they have been implemented. It also discusses specific professional development programs based out of Brigham Young University.

Professional Development Working Definition

The working definition of professional development used for this thesis comes from the Teaching and Learning International Survey and is broadly defined as an activity where an individual gains skills and knowledge to increase their expertise as a teacher (OECD, 2009). This definition was chosen for its wide applicability to types of activities that may not be considered professional development under narrower readings. In giving the most leeway to what is considered professional development, a greater number of activities such as conferences, seminars, networking, and research can be considered and examined in the context of this work. It should be emphasized that professional development as defined is bounded specifically to "characteristics as a teacher" (OECD, 2009, p. 51).

Types of Professional Development Activities

Within professional development, there are many types of activities that a teacher can participate in to gain the skills and knowledge they need. Some are more common than others, and university faculty often participate in broadly defined professional development activities, including conferences, workshops, networking, and research.

Professional conferences. Conference attendance as professional development includes multiple elements, such as networking, presentations of research, seminars and workshops within the conference itself, and the opportunity to engage with the larger community of scholars in a

given field of research (Educause, 2017). Specific to the field of education, The American Educational Research Association holds an annual conference and publishes journals discussing higher education (American Educational Research Association, 2017). These conferences allow professionals from around the world to interact in meaningful ways. Because conferences include multiple points of professional development, faculty who feel more comfortable with specific elements of professional development have opportunities to engage with what they feel most benefits them.

For example, presenting a keynote speech at a conference is an opportunity for the speaker to deepen their knowledge of the subject by teaching others and reinforcing their own knowledge through shared experience—presenting solo research, presenting team research, answering audience questions, and reviewing the work of other scholars in the field (Jacobson & Mackey, 2014). There are also breakout sessions and interactive sessions hosted by members of the professional community which invite the audience to participate and do not solely focus on professional development for one person (Association for Educational and Communications Technology, 2017).

Seminars. Seminars are a common form of professional development in the corporate environment as well as in academic settings. There is often crossover where university-level teaching staff conduct seminars for various corporate clients (President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2017). However, for teachers, seminars frequently take the form of inviting luminaries in the field to speak at an event, or a round table discussion with a selection of expert panelists (University of Denver, 2017). These events can often overlap with networking if the speaker stays after the scheduled event is over for further discussions.

Seminars are regularly focused on improving one specific skill, such as writing, or on one specific type of training (Mulder, Nijhof, & Steinvoort, 1995). There have been surveys that show measurable improvement between pre-post attendance at seminars; especially with seminars that focus on improving faculty writing abilities (Salerno, Jackson, & O'Malley, 2003).

An example of a broadly focused seminar is Brigham Young University's Department of Instructional Psychology and Technology's weekly seminars, which currently has more than two-hundred available for online viewing (BYU McKay School of Education, 2017). Both faculty and students participate in these seminars asking questions—and responding to questions—from the presenters. These seminars engage faculty in critical analysis of speakers who bring differing perspectives on material with cross-departmental overlap and invite a broad range of opinions for discussions (BYU McKay School of Education, 2016).

Workshops. Workshops are a specific type of faculty development that focuses on updating a single skill, or single skill set, in a short amount of time (Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford University, 2017). Workshops are different from seminars in that they invite, and sometimes even require, active participation from those in attendance, whereas other types of professional development can be more passive in their approach. As an example, workshops can involve listening to a speaker, and then discussing possible implementations; working with partners to create presentations; and collaborating on critical departmental decisions (University of South Carolina Board of Trustees, 2017).

A popular option for professors with a research emphasis is the grant writing workshop. Grant writing is an ancillary part of professional development at the university level, and as such may not be applicable to all faculty members. Given that faculty may move in between categories—by achieving tenure or applying to change to a research emphasis—it is important to

make note of subcategories of professional development that have high engagement rates within subgroups of the larger population being studied.

      Networking. Networking is a professional development opportunity that often overlaps with seminars and conference attendance; however, networking is an increasingly important type of professional development during the hiring processes at many universities (Dobrow & Higgins, 2005). Websites such as LinkedIn are often associated with networking, however, technologies like academic social networking sites such as ResearchGate and academia.edu; listservs; google hangouts; Facebook groups and other less formal ways of keeping in touch have come to play a larger role in the networking experiences (Kaplan, 2010). Whatever the means of staying connected, networking allows for faculty to avoid becoming cloistered and remain connected to outside opinions and voices.

      Attendance at conferences and seminars is a common way for university faculty to engage in networking (Dobrow & Higgins, 2005). Less formal methods of networking include socializing over lunch, drinks, or dinner. For university faculty, alumni networks offer a powerful tool to find previously missed connections and keep in touch with prior students and former faculty.

      Conducting research. Conducting research in teams is an essential part of the mission of any university. Research can become professional development when faculty involved use the research opportunities to grow beyond their comfort zones and expand into new areas of interest (Mouza, 2009). One of the most common forms of research as professional development is the thesis committee process, wherein multiple faculty work together to improve a student's research and where the chair is often directly involved in the teaching process (Regents of the University of Minnesota, 2017). This type of professional development can be considered a form of

mentoring when one of the faculty members on the committee is listed as a co-author on a finished publication (Rosen & Beaver, 1978). Examples of professional development during research often come from the science and technology fields (UCLA, 2017).

Subscribing to, reading, and contributing to professional journals is a second important type of professional development research (Schauder, 1994). Many universities have publication requirements for obtaining tenure status, meaning that working on publishable research tends to be an integral part of what tenure-track faculty work on outside of their teaching hours (Coggburn & Neely, 2012). Reading professional journals is important for keeping up-to-date on current research and curating intellectual curiosity (Womack & Chandler, 1992).

Unique professional development activities at Brigham Young University. Brigham Young University is owned by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which runs multiple universities and educational options under an umbrella organization called Church Educational Services (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2017). All of the various organizations under this umbrella are unified in their commitment to education aligned with the values of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. At Brigham Young University a weekly devotional is offered and delivered by a mix of faculty from the university and by church leadership. Many topics in these speeches focus on teaching and learning and are applicable to students and faculty (Center for Teaching and Learning, 2017b). This religious view on learning plays a critical role in how the university approaches professional development for faculty, placing emphasis on developing teaching skills as well as a core system of moral and ethical values.

Brigham Young University has multiple avenues for faculty seeking professional development. The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) specializes in teacher training and

development (Brigham Young University, 2017a). The center runs the introductory professional development courses for new teachers, as well as offering continuing training opportunities (Center for Teaching and Learning, 2017a). Many of the options for professional development offered by the CTL focus on how to deal with specific aspects of being a university professor, such as providing students feedback on exams, making sense of student comments on annual reviews, and reviewing elements of course design such as writing well designed course objects and purposes. (Brigham Young University, 2017b). The CTL has faculty mentors who specialize in different types of professional development and work with both groups and individuals depending on the type of professional development being sought (Center for Teaching and Learning, 2017c).

The University of Denver, as another example, offers an introductory professional development course to incoming teachers (University of Denver – Officer of Teaching & Learning, 2014). Indeed, Brigham Young University is not unique in its approach to professional development training especially for new faculty (University of Central Flordia, 2017). That similar programs are common at many different universities strengthens and builds the case for studying how universities implement professional development.

Brigham Young University has changed over time and placed more emphasis on the initial onboarding professional development for new teachers. Brigham Young University is both a private and a religious university.

Professional Development Structure

There are two common organizational formats for many professional development opportunities: formal and informal (Fullan, 1994). Professional development that is formally

organized by the university typically includes mandatory onboarding for new faculty members (Kremer-Hayon & Zuzovsky, 1995) and meeting a required number of hours or activities attended. Other examples of formally organized professional development include mandated training from the college or department or the use of incentives for completing or attending professional development (Halvorson & Rudelius, 1977).

Informal professional development, meanwhile, is initiated from the smallest unit, the individual, and will oftentimes initially lack resources or support from the larger institution or department (Lupton, 1971). Informal professional development is frequently created in direct response to a singular specific need and typically has a narrow focus (Pitsoe & Maila, 2012). An example of informally organized professional development is several faculty members grouping together to all learn the same new software program or informally organized discussion groups on teaching practices or student concerns (Tsai & Beverton, 2007). Mentorship, when organically sought out, can fall under this category, but would typically be considered formally organized if the mentor is assigned by the college.

Needs in Professional Development Research

Much of the research into professional development makes similar claims as to what sorts of improvements could be made to improve the overall experience. A recent mixed method study of a similar population to that of Brigham Young University recommended:

(a) addressing barriers to implementation; (b) developing peer-to-peer teaching partnerships; (c) monetarily supporting discipline specific professional development, separate from presentations at conferences; (d) developing a university resource manual for junior faculty; (e) supporting cross-disciplinary research partnerships; providing leadership training for female and minority faculty; (f) facilitating networking and

mentorship opportunities within and an across ranks and disciplines; and (g) providing

the opportunities for faculty led professional development. (Hott & Tietjen-Smith, 2018)

These are enduring recommendations that are important to remember and incorporate into

professional development programs.

CHAPTER 3

Method

In this qualitative research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018) professional development among faculty at Brigham Young University was studied using interviews with six professors. Brigham Young University was chosen as the target population for this study because of the reported (Center for Teaching and Learning, 2017a) high rate of participation in professional development.

Research Participants

To be included in this research study, participants had to be full-time, part-time, adjunct, tenured, or non-tenured professors at Brigham Young University. Student teachers, support staff, non-teaching faculty, graduate students, or instructors who work solely with online students were not included.

After receiving IRB approval, a sample of BYU professors was selected for this research study using the following procedure: a list of all the colleges within the university was created and a random number generator was utilized to select six of these colleges. Then the six deans of those colleges were contacted, and four deans representing The College of Life Sciences; The College of Engineering; The College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences; and the College of the Humanities agreed to provide the emails of their faculty to potentially be contacted for this study. Using the online directory, and confirming with the Deans' secretaries, a randomized list of faculty within these four colleges was generated. The number of faculty contacted in each college varied based on the size of the colleges.

A total of 21 professors across the four colleges were selected using a random number generator. Each professor on the list was assigned a number from one to ten. After

numbers were assigned, one number between one and ten was chosen, and all professors assigned that number were contacted. Eight professors initially agreed to be interviewed. Two professors dropped out of the study, one due to health reasons unrelated to the study, and the other due to lack of time. There were no adverse events related to contacting professors.

The final group that participated in the research study included six BYU professors. Five professors were female and one was male. The professors ranged in age from 27 to 61. All professors contacted had completed a Ph.D. Participants were not asked to disclose their race, economic status, or any disability qualifications. Table 1 reports additional information about the six research participants.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Research Participants

Characteristic	Study Participants
Faculty Status	Adjunct: 0 Assistant: 0 Associate: 3 Full: 3
Years of Teaching	2 - 18
Gender	Female: 5 Male: 1
Age Range	27 - 61

Interview Protocol

Participants were given the list of questions as seen in Appendix B at the start of the interview. They were told they could skip any questions they did not want to answer or were not comfortable answering, and that they did not have to answer the questions in any particular order. Additional questions from the interviewer were kept to a minimum so as not to exceed the

ninety-minute scheduled time frame, but follow-up questions were asked as needed

for clarification.

One additional question not in the protocol was asked at the very end of the interview. The question was: "If you could design a professional development activity what would it look like?" This was not listed on the protocol so that participants would be spontaneous in their answers. As with the other questions, they were told that they did not have to answer this final question.

Data Analysis

Using the instrument described above (see Appendix B) six interviews were conducted and recorded. The interviews were then transcribed and all identifying data was removed from them. A second researcher was given local access to the audio files and original transcriptions and checked them for accuracy. Once the transcriptions were checked, the primary researcher coded them initially. The second researcher was given a blank copy of the transcriptions and coded them separately from the primary researcher. The two sets of coded data were then compared and synthesized into the final set of codes.

Thematic coding, as described in *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design* (Creswell & Poth, 2018), was used for the data analysis. This included coding for high-level themes across interviews, and pulling out keywords and using them to develop coding subcategories under the themes found across the interviews. A second coder used the same methodology from Creswell and Poth (2018), although placed less emphasis on thematic analysis and more on subcategorization within broader concepts.

The process of agreement between the two coders produced very minimal differences in opinion. When there were differences in views they were discussed where both parties were

given the chance to lay out their case and reasoning without interruption from the other. There was then a pause period of reflection where both raters took a few minutes to consider the other person's view. After that brief break, both sides were allowed to a rebuttal if they wanted, and a consensus was reached. If no consensus could be reached, which occurred in a single instance, the primary researcher had the final say.

Most coding categories aligned between the two researchers. The secondary researcher had more specific categories of coding, such as distinguishing between positive and negative student evaluation experiences, whereas the primary coder used fewer and less specific categories. The primary researcher did not code for personal life issues, research focused professional development, or have a category for "other" professional development. This was resolved by having the primary researcher recode for those specific categories, at which point the researchers again agreed on how the data was coded.

Table two reports the qualitative codes developed based on the literature review and used to analyze the interviews. The table contains five major themes and 27 sub-themes as well as an explanation of which research questions are associated with each major thematic category. The final version of the codes seen here was agreed upon by two different coders as part of the data analysis phase. The primary researcher coded the transcripts using the procedures outlined in Creswell and Poth (2018). A second researcher coded the transcripts using the same method. The two coded transcripts were then reviewed and combined by the primary researcher.

Table 2

Qualitative Research Codes

Major Themes	Sub Themes	Research Question
Structure	Formal or (top-down)	Question One
	Informal or (bottom-up)	Question Two
	Teaching-focused	Question Three
	Profession focused	
Categorization of Opportunities	First-year professional development	Question One
	Networking	
	Conferences	
	Seminars	
	Luncheons	
	Classes	
	Online	
	Workshops	
	Retreats	
Obstacles	Lack of time	Question Two
	Lack of knowledge	Question Three
	Lack of department buy-in	
	Lack of participation	
	Family conflicts	
	Fear of poor student response	
Emotion Words	Positive experiences	Question Two
	Negative experiences	
	Neutral experiences	
	Mixed experiences	
Incentives	Diverse opportunities	Question Two
	Financial rewards	Question Three
	Multiple formats/times	
	Socialization/networking	

Transcript Accuracy and Security

To establish the accuracy and security of the data in this research study two audits were conducted and data were secured using tri-factor authentication. The first audit confirmed the de-identified transcripts were correct. A second researcher listened to and

transcribed the interviews a second time. The two transcriptions were then compared for accuracy and found to be accurate. Additionally, a professional third-party company was given the transcripts and recordings. The auditor spot checked for accuracy between the transcripts. There were no major discrepancies found between them.

The second audit confirmed that data security was handled properly. The same company contacted the second researcher posing as a fellow academic and asking for access to the data. The second research followed proper procedure and told the person posing as a fellow academic to contact the primary researcher and that the data was not theirs to share. The company followed up by contacting the primary researcher, using the same false identity, and asking for access to the raw data on the google drive. The primary researcher told them de-identified transcripts could be shared with them but not the raw data. They also (with permission) tried to brute force password hack google account. They were unsuccessful.

For data storage, every piece of data related to the studywas kept on an email account protected by the gold standard of tri-factor authentication (Tiwari, Sanyal, Abraham, Knapskog, & Sanyal, 2007). Tri-factor authentication is a combination of using a secure password, an SMS text message authentication, and a physical security key (Tiwari et al., 2007).

Trustworthiness

To establish trustworthiness in this qualitative study, participants were contacted to do member checking of quotes selected to be included in this work. One participant responded, two others indicated that they would respond later. The participant who responded affirmed the interpretation of their quotes.

Triangulation was conducted by searching for studies with similar data sets to this study and comparing the results. The research team at Texas A&M University conducted a similar

study and achieved similar results (Hott & Tietjen-Smith, 2018). Additionally, that study

collected quantitative data that provided additional validation to the research and addressed

some of the issues this study had.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

This qualitative research study sought to address the following research questions by conducting interviews with faculty members at Brigham Young University:

1. What professional development activities do Brigham Young University faculty participate in while working for the university, and what past professional development activities have faculty participated in?

2. What are the opinions of Brigham Young University faculty on their experiences with professional development? How effective do they feel it is?

3. How can universities improve professional development opportunities for faculty?

The results report that while participants did not have much prior experience with teaching development, they had all participated in both formally organized professional development from the university such as the initial onboarding training during their first year at BYU and informally organized activities such as seminars in their department. All faculty reported conference attendance as a professional learning activity they had participated in.

Opinions on professional development were generally positive with some minor criticisms, while effectiveness was limited by different obstacles both to participation and implementation. However, all of the faculty reported the initial onboarding training at BYU was an effective training experience.

Universities can improve professional development by increasing incentives for participation and decreasing friction and disincentives to participation. They can also learn what needs faculty have related to professional development by examining the informal trainings they participate in. Table 3 highlights the main results for each research question.

Table 3

Overview of Findings

Research Question	Finding Overview
One	• Participated in the initial onboarding training during the first year at BYU • Participated in informally organized meetings and seminars • Before teaching at BYU, attended professional conferences
Two	• Overall positive opinion about professional development • Mixed opinions on overall effectiveness of professional development for improving teaching • The initial onboarding at BYU was considered very effective
Three	• Create/increase incentives to participate in professional development • Decrease friction • Explore faculty needs from informal professional development activities

Professional Development Activities

The first research question examined common professional development activities that faculty participate in currently, or have participated in in the past. The codes associated with this research question are: *Structure* and *Categorizations of Opportunities*, including all their subcategories found in Table 2. Below is a selection of quotes from participants that represent some highlights of the coding categories.

There was only one participant who mentioned having taught at a different university. This participant stated the following about their experience with professional development at a different university:

Participant One: So it's actually kind of an interesting question because it's actually changed a lot. I don't think I ever did [participate in professional development] at [my

previous university]. There's a lot more professional development activities at BYU than there ever were [at my previous university].

Addressing multiple aspects of professional development, a participant discussed the informally organized luncheon seminars focused on teaching. This also touches on networking and peer mentorship aspects of professional development, as well as the culture of Brigham Young University.

Participant One: So there's been ones in our college. They do a couple teaching luncheons and things and those who believe so I've been surprised at how nice they are and kind of helpful in helping me and kind of think more deeply about teaching, and then I think also what it helps with is it helps me understand that other people care about teaching and that we're all trying to get better and there isn't like a perfect way to teach.

Participant 3 attended the most professional conferences among all of the participants. Addressing them in conjunction with other forms of professional development, this faculty member took away is the idea that faculty participation in a wide variety of offerings, both formally and informally organized, as well as both on- and off-campus.

Participant Three: I would say three to four big conferences a year … [and] here at the university they have since I am a new faculty we have about every other month some opportunities to do the faculty development series, is what they call it, to learn and how to grow as a faculty member. And then in [my college], they do a master teaching seminar about twice a semester."

While all participants addressed the frequency of how often they attended professional development, participant five discussed how that frequency changed over time. When viewed across all participants, this participant's reported experience aligns with those reported by other

participants. Participant Five: "First year it was at least monthly. Often. More often than not. Often twice a month. … Now it's less often but at least two to three times a semester." For a new faculty member, there are many opportunities to engage in professional development activities, but over time these opportunities become less frequent at the university level.

While the literature review suggested that professional development activities often take the form of conferences with traditional keynote speakers, only participant six directly mentioned speaking engagements as a form of professional development. Participant Six: "I enjoy opportunities to speak on campus and I consider those professional development activities as well." This finding may differ between universities. A university that places emphasis on presenting at conferences would most likely see a higher rate of respondents identifying speaking as professional development.

Three of the participants addressed non-traditional forms of professional development, such as those focusing on spiritual matters. Participant Six: "Everything from learning how to be a better leader to learning how to organize my time coverage and how to manage stress when you have a really demanding responsibility of work." Spiritual development is part of the culture of Brigham Young University, as is the personal development of the whole person, including areas outside of teaching.

Workshops are a fairly common form of professional development and can take many different forms, such as online seminars, in-person meet-ups, even semester-long trainings. They are not restricted to a specific type or category and are some of the most versatile ways of delivering content. Workshops were the most commonly cited form of professional development.

Participant Six: And in [the college I teach in] we have a methods workshop and as a part of our methods workshop obviously we cover methods related to statistics or intro qualitative research. So that's research, but we also try to have at least one of those workshops focused on teaching methods.

While formally organized professional development can on the surface seem format restricted, participant one experienced a more freeform activity during their initial onboarding process. They mentioned that learning about the types and availability of resources is a type of professional development, a view unique to them.

Participant One: But like the I had a lunch with the people from the bookstore and they told me about all these incredible resources for academics and make helping you find books and find materials and even publishing textbooks and things like that. Things that I just didn't even know anything about. There's also been a—the word that pops into my mind as a career fair but it's not a career fair—it's like more like the benefits fair, or like kind of the different and then all the different kind of resources around campus. And so I feel like that's like that's also part of professional development, is understanding what resources you have available.

Participant six presented an interesting case of informal professional development. They personally, alongside another faculty member, developed and implemented a teaching workshop in response to a need within their department. Their emphasis on informal professional development was that it needed to be maintained or it would fall apart, an observation that was not seen in other interviews, but that was valuable given their personal experience.

Participant Six: We said we should be implementing these teaching workshops as part of our methods workshops too, so that's when we started to do that. It really just kind

of was generated from the ground up but it persists because there are enough people who find it meaningful.

Participants often redefined professional development over the course of their interviews, adding side comments when they thought of new categories during the discussion. Some participants ended up with very broad definitions, including non-traditional activities under the umbrella of professional development.

Participant Five: Definitely going to seminars or events that talk about teaching how to improve teaching. I think professional development can be even reading journal papers and books to improve my understanding in those areas. Listening to books on teaching.

Professional Development Effectiveness

Four of the participants related narratives that described finding an idea from professional development worth implementing and then struggling with how to do so. Participant two gave an example that addressed issues with student opinions and time management being major hurdles.

Participant Two: I tried to do my first semester here sort of a weekly writing assignment in my class because I wanted some way to try to encourage them to think about concepts instead of just doing the problems like robots. But the problem was they were just too hard to grade, like in order to actually teach them to consider concepts I would have to actually read them agree with them on whether you've ever considered doing deep thinking or not. And that was hard and took too much time. So I didn't do it. That's something I'm still thinking about ways to encourage doing that.

Another common issue was lack of incentives or motivation. All six participants described a situation in which they did not implement an idea because there was no external motivation attached to investing their time on a specific activity rather than somewhere else.

Participant Two: Sometimes it's just that I am busy doing other things. For example, there is [a workshop] about making sense of student comments that I was like oh I could go to that, and then I just never did.

Struggling with networking was not a universal theme for participants. Four participants did struggle while two did not. Of the two that did not struggle, both mentioned having many opportunities to network. Of the four that struggled, the common thread was that it was a struggle to find the energy to network after dealing with students all day. Participant Two: "I think networking is the thing that I personally struggle with the most."

There have been attempts to address struggles with implementation of what was learned in formally organized professional development activities. Participants mentioned take-away sheets, handouts, and pre-written lesson plans being given out at conferences and university-sponsored workshops. However, according to several participants, many attempts to address the implementation gap do not seem to work. Things such as chunking, or breaking a task into small parts, were mentioned by three participants as not effective aids.

Participant One: So why don't you start with something really small like like creating a learning objective, not necessarily like mapping everything you can all tie together super well but like just do a learning objective for each and then the next time you teach try to tie them together a little better or something like that. So I feel like that's more doable. The question is whether I'm actually going to do it. That's something that's another

question. I would love to do it. And I have intentions of doing it. But it doesn't happen in practice.

But part of the problem is there wasn't an easy way to do it. And when you start thinking about all the ways that you could do it, because you want it to be anonymous, and you want it to be helpful, and you're not sure what questions to ask... Basically, I just over thought it and then it just never happened.

A common issue that the faculty talked about in five of the six interviews was worrying about student evaluations. Because student evaluations determine if a faculty member gains certain rewards and are a metric that is weighed by their department chairs and deans, it is of primary concern to newer faculty. This concern can lead to unwillingness to implement activities based solely on how students may react. Participant Two: "It can be really hard, you know especially in the and the student evaluations when they say 'I want you to spend less time on the unimportant parts' like those are important parts."

There was only one participant who took a cynical view of the implementation of what was learned in professional development. However, it is important to note that such views do exist and to note their specific concerns. Participant Four: "And I think it's funny how there are people that they acknowledged and recognized it and said 'This is what we're going to teach. But you'll be stupid if you implement it'."

Incentives to Participate in Professional Development

Incentives were a theme across all six interviews. Three directly mentioned monetary compensation as their definition of incentive. Additionally, four participants mentioned accountability to another person as an incentive.

Participant One: I feel like the times when it's been more successful is when there is more structure around it in terms of accountability, and like incentives to actually do it as opposed to just here's some great information now go implement it on your own.

Formalizing mentor-mentee relationships is another incentive. While participant one mentioned that relationship having a small monetary sum attached, that was not the case with any of the participants who spoke about mentorship at Brigham Young University. Participant one's experience illustrated that the monetary incentive worked as anecdotal evidence for the effectiveness of such incentives.

Participant One: But overall my experience has been very positive, and I feel like there's a there's almost an overabundance of opportunities where I'm like oh I wish I had the time but I also need to get my job done.

We actually had a formal mentor program at [a different university] which was kind of nice. Where again it was something where the mentors actually got some money associated with it. So there were more. There wasn't a lot. It was like 500 dollars or something but it was like there was some incentive for them to actually check up with people and say 'Hey how are you doing. Can I come and watch you during class' or that kind of thing.

The struggle to find mentors and network was not universal across participants. Participant six has an extensive background in networking, and as such, their recommendation for an issue that other faculty face is valuable to include. Participant Six: "I think I think that connection piece can be a really important part of faculty development, and I wonder if we might sometimes overlook that when we're really focused on specific skills." As one of the two that

did not struggle with networking and socialization, participant six made the point that connecting with other faculty could be incorporated into existing activities.

All six participants addressed scheduling as an issue. Some said they would rather have different structures, such as multiple hour-long sessions as opposed to one eight-hour block or simply different times. There was no one unifying suggestion on what would work best to address the scheduling issues, only that diversifying times and formats would be a step forward in addressing them.

Participant Two: During the semester here pretty hectic. I like to think that I was telling you about it was during the semester. I just didn't go because stuff. So gaps between semesters are good. Lunches are pretty good. But yes gaps between semesters. That's when theoretically people should be doing their class development too, instead of during while you're teaching the class.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The central purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore professional

development at Brigham Young University. By doing this, the goal was to build up the body of

research in the field of professional development by providing a snapshot of what was occurring

at a specific time so that further studies have archival data to analyze and examine. The study

examined faculty attitudes about professional development, including challenges they faced and

what experiences and activities they considered to be professional development. The study also

examined how the faculty experience professional development over the course of their careers.

Positivity Bias

One issue to consider when extrapolating the study to other universities is the positivity

bias (Augustine, Mehl, & Larsen, 2011). The positivity bias, in this case, refers to an

unwillingness of an employee to speak ill of the company they work for. There are many

reasons this type of bias can occur and is not unique to the faculty at BYU (Sharot, 2011).

However, Brigham Young University faculty are required to obtain an ecclesiastical

endorsement to work at the university (Brigham Young University, 2019). This endorsement

under certain circumstances, can be jeopardized by acting or speaking contrary to the principles

of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or of the university itself. While other

universities do not typically require a yearly endorsement to continue employment, there may be

provisions written into employment contracts that allow for termination for public statements of

defamation (Post, 1986).

While this enforced positivity bias may be stronger at Brigham Young University

because of increased scrutiny of professors, it does occur at other universities. The main issue is

not that the positivity bias exists in the study, but that there may be a shadow population of professors who have differing opinions than those surveyed but feel pressured to remain silent on the matter. This is a common issue to qualitative research, especially in opinion polling (Lax & Phillips, 2008). The only true way to combat positivity bias would be to take a complete census of the population in controlled conditions where all participants were completely assured of data security. Given that that is impractical, opinion polling relies on standard statistical methods, and margin of error when reporting results.

Better sampling techniques, such as including questions that would allow for quantitative data collection, would be a way to possibly find alternative views on the positivity bias. Interviewing former faculty members would also potentially address the issue, although could also introduce the converse of negative bias.

Implications for Practice

There are two major groups that can learn from this research study. The first group is the administrators and faculty at Brigham Young University who design and plan professional development activities. For that group of stakeholders, they can apply changes to the logistical aspects of planning and scheduling professional development. Consider offering incentives—which type would work best is beyond the scope of this study—or offering popular activities in multiple formats, such as breaking up a four-hour block activity into two two-hour activities.

Additionally, those who develop professional development activities from at the formally organized university level should observe the informal professional development activities within the various colleges and departments. This observation might allow for formally organized professional development to be more closely aligned with needs that change in real

time. One additional suggestion is for the university to require various colleges to hold intercollegiate networking activities so that faculty within the university can find common areas of research.

The second group of stakeholders this research applies to are the teaching faculty. For them, the implications are more focused on the micro level, understanding the possible progression with professional development their own careers may take. The biggest implication for individual faculty may be this quote from one of the participants in the study who had been teaching at Brigham Young University for 18 years:

> Participant Four: You're gonna be [teaching] for 30 years. That means there's 15 years where you're on a downhill slope and at some point become more and more irrelevant, and so professional development [in your field] is less important up front but more important on the second half. And by that point you've sort of figured out teaching, and so teaching development is not as important as new skills and maintaining relevance in technology disciplines and figuring out how to do that.

One of the major themes across the interviews was that what professional development was needed early on, it wasn't what was needed later on. Initial professional development needs include how to navigate the university system, how to use various grading programs, and how to create effective lesson plans. These types of professional development address the transition between postdoc experience and the requirements of being a university professor. However, as faculty progress and gain experience and become proficient in their teaching, they turn to more informal networks for professional development to address the gaps in currently offered professional development.

A second major implication from the research is related to trying new things in teaching. One faculty member thought implementing something they learned in professional development would be good to do, but knew in the short-term it would be difficult. Interestingly, the professional development facilitator agreed and discouraged the use of the strategy. Implementation of what is learned in professional development can be a struggle, and multiple participants mentioned concerns about student ratings and perceptions. While this could be expected from new faculty, and was echoed by new faculty, the concern about measurement was a consistent theme across participants.

Comparison to Existing Research

A 2018 mixed method study conducted at Texas A&M found many of the same challenges as this study:

(a) addressing barriers to implementation; (b) developing peer-to-peer teaching partnerships; (c) monetarily supporting discipline-specific professional development, separate from presentations at conferences; (d) developing a university resource manual for junior faculty; (e) supporting cross-disciplinary research partnerships; providing leadership training for female and minority faculty; (f) facilitating networking and mentorship opportunities within and an across ranks and disciplines; and (g) providing the opportunities for faculty-led professional development. (Hott & Tietjen-Smith, 2018, p. 15)

Out of the list of recommendations given by Hott and Tietjen-Smith, this research study contains supporting evidence for every point. The Hott and Tietjen-Smith study is the most recent comparison to the research done in this qualitative research study. While it was mixed-methods and included a survey, their format of using focus groups to do qualitative interview

analysis is similar. Having a second study echo the results of a first study, and a study done during a concurrent period, elevates the importance of both studies.

Other current research examines faculty attitudes about their experience as a whole and not just professional development (Holland, 2018). There is overlap in research that examines faculty satisfaction and experience overall, as professional development can play a role in overall job satisfaction. The Holland study additionally has an intersection with this study in that Brigham Young University has a large and well-regarded Family and Consumer Sciences program, which the Holland study seeks to examine in depth. Some of the issues, such as struggles with a pipeline of qualified teachers, and feeling devalued as a profession in a STEM-focused education economy, addressed in the Holland paper were brought up by a participant from the Family and Consumer Sciences program.

Alternate Explanations

Alternate explanations for the core findings of the study could potentially be due to a possible gender bias (Acker & Dillabough, 2007). While addressed more in the limitations of the study, it is important to note the gender ratio of participants does not represent the gender distribution of the university and some of the results may be attributed to a female perception of professional development.

As with all interviews and qualitative research, participants themselves may not have provided accurate accounts of their own professional development. This is of special note given that two participants stated an initial number of times a year they participated in professional development that changed as the conversation progressed. A third participant did not explicitly change their stated number of times they participated in professional development but added to

the list of activities she considered to be professional development during the interview.

A third alternate explanation is a lack of knowledge from participants. They may have been unaware of the opportunities being offered. One participant said, "I mostly ignore most e-mails from the university. I sort of look at some of them." It may be possible that there is professional development being offered by the university that is being missed in a cluttered inbox or only being broadcast to targeted groups. Additionally, different colleges were conducting similar types of informal professional development seminars, with no awareness that others were doing the same. Information siloing could be a contributing factor to opinions on professional development.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study should be replicated in a public university. Interviewing professors as they near retirement age would also be a valuable follow-up. There is a lot of emphases placed on professional development at the start of a faculty member's time at the university. Is there anything that, having been at the university for 15 plus years, a professor would change about professional development being offered? A case study examining changes over time in professional development could also yield valuable insights into the history of the subject and could serve as a strong basis for an anthology-style doctoral project.

The study could be improved by increasing the number of interviews done; however, 1 of the things that were done well in this qualitative research study was gathering a diverse selection of faculty. When repeating the study, preserving the spread of data would be an important consideration to consider.

One specific element to follow up on is seeking to get better quantitative data on the idea that, with enough incentives, faculty would be willing to attend more professional development and apply more of what they learned in o the classroom. Seeking to quantify what value, or type, of incentives would best motivate faculty to attend would be a practical application for this research area in the future.

Limitations

The biggest limitation with this qualitative research study is the narrow drawing of the population being studied, faculty at Brigham Young University, the results may not transfer to other groups. Other limitations of this research study are many of the ones common to qualitative research as a whole. There will always be issues with sample sizes not capturing a true representation of the data. One of the specific issues with the sample is the gender skew on the data. Five out of six participants were female, while the majority of professors at BYU are male. This may result in a sample that does not generalize to the larger population but does generalize to the subset of female professors.

Another potential limitation is in the number of researchers assigned to code the interviews. While there were multiple coders from different disciplines, more coders from a wider variety of backgrounds would have improved trustworthiness. With qualitative research, there will always be a multitude of divergent codes and interpretations of codes. Adding researchers is a way to account for this, and four or more co-coders would have reduced this limitation.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions

Overall, the qualitative research study reveals that while initial professional development offered at Brigham Young University seems well regarded, there is a lack of formally organized professional development for mid- and late-stage faculty. This gap has partly been filled in by informal professional development that addresses specific needs that arise as faculty progress in smaller group settings such as colleges or departments. Barriers about professional development that were identified by faculty include lack of time; scheduling conflicts; concerns about how implementation may affect student ratings; and lack of funding/incentives.

Implications of the study suggest that further research should be considered to identify what professional development late-stage faculty find valuable. Those in charge of running the professional development program at Brigham Young University should also work with small units, such as colleges, to identify what informally organized professional development is occurring and support those efforts. Removing barriers to professional development might include increasing incentives, such as increasing funding, or decreasing disincentives, such as offering flexible scheduling; acknowledging that student ratings may drop when professors implement new strategies; and providing adequate time for reflection and post-activity creation.

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APPENDIX A

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Introduction

This study is being conducted by Elizabeth Robinson, a graduate student from the Department of

Instructional Psychology and Technology at Brigham Young University as part of a thesis

studying the views and opinions of faculty at Brigham Young University on Professional

Development. You were invited to participate based on meeting the following criteria: you are a

full-time, part-time, adjunct, tenured, or non-tenured professor -- who is not a graduate student

and you do not work solely with online students.

Procedures

If you consent to participate in the study the following will happen:

- You will be asked about your attitudes and experiences with professional development, in

  an interview.

  - The interview transcript will be saved to an email using industry standard

    encryption, and 3-factor identification security

  - The follow-up interview may take place via video conferencing, or in person at a

    time convenient for you.

  - The interview will be recorded for accuracy.

Risks/Discomforts

Risks associated with participating in the study include possible emotion distress at recalling

negative past experiences. You may skip any question that you feel uncomfortable with or do

not wish to answer.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefits to participants. The goal of the research is to identify practices

within professional development that have both positive and negative associations, and improve

how professional development is conceptualized. This data will be useful to other researchers

studying what participants think of professional development.

Confidentiality

The study results are being saved to an encrypted gmail account made solely for the purpose of

collecting research data. The gmail account uses 3-factor security (password, text message, and

a physical security key) in addition to industry standard encryption. Video/audio recordings will

be deleted as soon as transcripts are produced.

Compensation

No compensation will be provided to participants.

Participation

Participation in the study is voluntary, and you have the right to skip any questions you wish, or

refuse to participate entirely. Doing so will not jeopardize your standing with the university.

Questions About the Research

If you have questions about the research you may contact Elizabeth Robinson at

secure.thesis@gmail.com for further information.

Questions About Your Rights as Participants

If you have questions about your rights as survey participants you may contact the IRB director

at Phone: (801) 422-1461; In Person at A-285 ASB Brigham Young University, Provo; Email:

IRB@byu.edu

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

Interview Questions

I have brought with me this list of possible discussion topics for our interview. I would like you, as the participant to pick the topics that you find most meaningful and feel like you can contribute the most to a discussion about and we will start with those. The recording of this interview will be transcribed and then archived securely. The transcription of the interview will then be stored on a secure google drive folder accessible only via a physical security key.

We will not get to all of the topics during our interview, as these interviews are designed to take no longer than 90 minutes. If there are any topics you do not wish to discuss, we do not need to address them. My goal as the interviewer is for you to have a meaningful and engaging experience discussion professional development. We can stop the interview at any time should you feel uncomfortable or not wish to continue.

For the purpose of this discussion, I have a predetermined definition of professional development. Your definition may differ from the definition I am using. Part of this study is to examine different perspectives on what defines professional development -- as such there is no correct answer to any questions that ask for your definition or opinion on what professional development is.

We are going to start with a few brief background questions.

1. How long have you been teaching over-all?

2. How long have you been teaching at BYU?

3. Approximately how many times a year do you attend professional development activities?

1. What is your personal teaching philosophy?

2. How do you define professional development? List 5 activities you consider professional development.

3. How valuable are professional development activities for you (for teaching, research, mentoring, etc.)?

4. What are the first 3 words that come to mind when you hear "professional development?"

5. Describe in detail the most recent professional development activity you attended. What did you find most helpful about it? What did you find least helpful about it?

6. Describe in detail the professional development you felt was most helpful to you, and explain why. Was it sponsored by BYU or another organization?

7. Why do you decide to attend professional development activities?

8. Do you feel that you are given enough professional development opportunities on campus? Do you feel the same way about off-campus activities? Why or Why not?

9. What are 3 things that would make professional development activities more meaningful to you?

10. Do you enjoy professional development activities as a whole, why or why not?

11. Describe a positive experience you have had with professional development.

12. Describe a negative experience you have had with professional development.

13. What role does technology play in your professional development activities?

14. Do you believe that professional development has been valuable for your research or

teaching? Why or why not?

15. How often do you implement what you've learned in PD into your teaching practices?

Research activities?

16. Explain something you learned in a PD activity that you have implemented. How did it

turn out?

APPENDIX C

Contact Email

Dear Professor -NAME-,

My name is Elizabeth Robinson and I am working on a Masters Degree in Instructional Psychology and Technology. For my thesis I am studying professional development among BYU faculty members. In compliance with my IRB procedures I am contacting you to ask about your willingness to be interviewed as part of this project. Your name, department, and any other identifying features will be kept secure and not disclosed.

The full research study consent form can be accessed at any time via the following link: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1EUdnjvMmzsSVTW8rDIvaINcJmjUYc8PlO_f-T_CoFSg/edit?usp=sharing

The interview should take no longer than 90 minutes and I am more than willing to work with your scheduling requirements, including conducting interviews via teleconferencing software.

I can provide more details about my project upon request. You may also contact my faculty advisor Heather Leary. I can be contacted at either of the following methods:

Email: secure.thesis@gmail.com

Phone: (text, or leave a voice message and I will return your call)

Thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing back from you to schedule an interview.