The Professional Development of Rural ESL Instructors: Program Administrators' and Instructors' Views

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In this article, we report perceived professional development (PD) needs, interests, and challenges of ESL instructors in rural Alberta from the perspectives of instructors and administrators. We collected questionnaire responses from instructors who taught in programs offered in five rural locations with a large recent influx of newcomers requiring ESL instruction. This was followed by focus-group interviews with the instructors and individual interviews with their program administrators. The findings highlight the importance of PD designed to meet the specific needs of rural instructors and to facilitate effective ESL teaching and learning in their communities. We offer recommendations for designing PD for ESL programs.

Dans cet article, nous évoquons les besoins, les intérêts et les défis en perfectionnement professionnel pour les enseignants d'ALS dans les régions rurales de l'Alberta tels qu'ils sont perçus par les enseignants et les administrateurs. Nous avons recueilli les réponses aux questionnaires complétés par des enseignants qui travaillaient dans des programmes d'ALS offerts dans cinq milieux ruraux ayant récemment reçu un important afflux de nouveaux arrivants. Par la suite, nous avons mené des entrevues auprès de groupes de consultation composés d'enseignants et des entrevues individuels auprès d'administrateurs de programmes. Les résultats soulignent l'importance du perfectionnement professionnel conçu pour répondre aux besoins spécifiques des enseignants ruraux et pour faciliter l'enseignement et l'apprentissage efficaces de l'ALS dans leurs communautés. Nous offrons des recommandations portant sur la conception du perfectionnement professionnel dans le cadre de programmes d'ALS.

Alberta attracts immigrants and refugees from all over the world who bring with them education, skills, and/or work experience from their home countries. Newcomers with limited English-language proficiency need opportunities to develop communicative and cultural competence so that they can participate fully in society. Whereas larger centers offer a wide range of language and settlement services to assist newcomers in achieving these goals, many smaller communities do not. Immigrants in smaller centers without this support may not only have greater difficulty with cultural adaptation, but may experience more serious employment issues related to communication, health, and safety (Kukushkin, 2009), as well as underemployment, limited opportunities for advancement, and lack of social integration in the local community.

At present, as immigration and the need for English-language training programs are increasing, programs throughout Alberta are experiencing a growing shortage of qualified English as a second language (ESL) instructors. This problem is likely to be exacerbated in the future, as more than half of 266 adult ESL teachers surveyed anticipated leaving the field by 2012 (MacCormac & Kershaw, 2007). As a result, ESL program administrators in urban and rural areas will probably find it even more difficult to attract and retain qualified ESL instructors in the future.

Depending on the extent of their training, instructors with teaching English as a second language (TESL) preparation are able to varying degrees to meet the diverse needs of their learners, but extensive TESL training is not readily available outside large urban centers. As a result, program administrators are frequently compelled to hire instructors with little or no training in TESL or adult education. Rural communities in particular are limited in the extent to which they are able to respond to the specific goals and needs of newcomers who require ESL instruction. Quality professional development (PD) programs could help ESL instructors increase their capacity to provide effective ESL instruction, especially in smaller centers. This would enhance the settlement experience of immigrants and refugees and ultimately benefit the communities in which they live.

In this article, we begin with a review of the literature related to PD in education and follow with a description of the research methods used to identify rural adult ESL instructor PD needs, interests, and issues related to programming. Next, we present a summary of our research findings along with a discussion of the similarities and differences between administrators' and instructors' views. Finally, we provide recommendations for designing PD programs that may respond better to both administrators' and rural ESL instructors' needs.

Professional Development

An important continuing issue for program administrators is how to enhance the effectiveness of ESL classroom instruction. Quality of instruction is a key factor in determining the success of an English language program (Darling-Hammond, 1997, 1999; Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2005; Norris & Ortega, 2000). Quality instruction, which has been conceptualized as responsive teaching (Pressley, Duke, & Boling, 2004), incorporates a variety of strategies that respond to students' learning profiles/preferences, interests, and readiness/proficiency levels (Brown, 2007; Tomlinson et al., 2004). It follows logically that responsive instructors who continue to hone their expertise in ESL pedagogy through ongoing PD are better prepared to meet the needs of changing learner populations, to improve newcomers' communicative competence, and to facilitate their integration into the communities in which they live.

Characteristics of Successful PD

In general, effective teacher development programs facilitate "teachers' understanding of teaching and of themselves as teachers" (Richards & Farrell, 2005, p. 4). Rossner (1992, cited in Piai, 2005) cites four important characteristics of effective teacher PD:

1. "it is about dealing with the needs and wants of the individual teacher in ways that suit that individual" (p. 20);
2. "much of [PD] is seen as relating to new experiences, new challenges and the opportunity for teachers to broaden their repertoire and take on new responsibilities and challenges" (p. 21);

3. "[PD] is not just to do with language teaching or even teaching: it's also about language development (particularly for teachers whose native language is not English), counselling skills, assertiveness training, confidence-building, computing, mediation, cultural broadening—almost anything in fact" (p. 21);

4. "[PD], in most teachers' opinions, has to be 'bottom-up,' not dished out by managers according to their own view of what development teachers need" (p. 21).

More recent research on teacher PD corroborates and extends Rossner's findings, concluding that deliverers of PD should consider instructors' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experiences (Richardson & Placier, 2002) along with the teaching context, the purpose, and the most effective approaches for delivering PD (Putnam & Borko, 2000).

According to Sparks and Hirsch (1997), successful PD programs promote participants' ownership so that (a) the focus is on the specific needs of the group, and (b) participants act as resources for one another. O'Hara and Pritchard (2008) identify additional factors that contribute to successful PD: scheduling, delivery mode, and administrative support and leadership. It is important that all instructors attend scheduled PD sessions so that emphasis can be placed on peer modeling, coaching, and developing problem-solving skills relevant to participants' needs. PD should provide instructors with opportunities to experiment with, practice, and reflect on evidence-based techniques that meet their intended PD goals and assist them in becoming skilled with the new, more effective practices (Helsing, Kegan, & Lahey, 2008). Successful PD programs are not shallow, fragmented, unfocused, or based on educational fads; rather, they are grounded in research (Ellmore, 2004).

Effective knowledge-sharing in professional groups requires communities of practice where social learning occurs when people with a common interest collaborate to share ideas, address issues, and build innovations to advance the field of practice (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Regular interactions over extended periods in the form of interprofessional forums are necessary sources for improving professional practice (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). As Shank (2005) suggests, administrators need to provide time for instructors to meet regularly and to address shared concerns. This will help foster friendly, supportive professional relationships and encourage the development of teaching/learning communities that contribute to instructors' satisfaction (Davison, 2001).

Models of ESL PD

Four models of professional development for ESL instructors have been outlined by Crandall (1993). The *craft or mentoring* model focuses on collaboration with a master teacher (lesson-plan development, peer observation, reflective practice). The applied science or *theory to practice* model includes video training, discussion of objectives, teaching principles, modeling of the technique, analysis, application, and follow-up. *Inquiry or reflective practice* models involve teachers and often others (researchers, administrators) in all phases of action research. The fourth model is a combination of all three models in one setting, integrating theory and practice to enhance PD. Successful PD programs will concentrate on aspects of professional growth that are relevant for the particular instructors in the institutional, sociocultural, and political context in which they teach. Therefore, a program with a range of teachers from novice to expert must adopt a PD model that is flexible enough to address the PD goals of instructors at varying stages of PD.

Davison's (2001) alternative model of PD is similar to Crandall's (1993) fourth combination model in many respects; however, the key difference is its critical orientation. In Davison's model, "professional knowledge is seen as being jointly constructed and both experiential and theory driven" (p. 88); PD content is negotiated by stakeholders (system, program, instructors), and problems are presented by experts who frame the PD input and activities and guide participants to develop solutions. As a result, PD takes place "through conflict and critique, not just collaboration (or co-option), [and] friction not just reflection" (p. 88).

As Davison (2001) suggests, the term *development* implies "evolution, enhancement, improvement, progress—but not all models of PD are perceived to have these characteristics" (p. 83; see also Thomson, 2004, for a critique of TESL training opportunities in Canada). Varying definitions and models generate a range of approaches to PD programs, the goals of which relate to some combination of individual, professional, managerial, or organizational development (Smith & Hofer, 2002). With the current emphasis on education as a business system, staff development is viewed as a means to enhance accountability and performance in order to improve institutional success (Gewirtz, 2002). Therefore, whereas instructors may be more interested in PD that enhances their careers or promotes individual effectiveness and learning, program administrators working in a business management model of education may give preference to PD that improves organizational effectiveness. These opposing interests and goals can result in PD plans that address the needs of certain members or parts of the organization while neglecting significant others. A perceived disconnect in views and expectations of PD may create tension between program administrators and instructors; therefore, as Belzer (2005) recommends, it is important that all stakeholders be involved in developing a shared vision for professional development.

Although a vast literature exists on general professional development (see examples above), information specific to developing communities of practice and supporting or extending PD for ESL teachers is less extensive (but see, e.g., Egbert, 2003; Murphey, 2003; Murphey & Sato, 2005; Schaetzel, Peyton, & Burt, 2007). Furthermore, research on professional development in adult ESL education is limited; to our knowledge, no research has been conducted focusing specifically on the PD needs of adult ESL instructors in rural communities. This study was designed to identify instructors' professional development needs, preferences, and issues as perceived by both administrators and instructors in these programs.

Method

Participants

The participants were from five rural communities (2 large towns and 3 small cities) located in diverse geographic regions of Alberta. Thirty-six instructors were surveyed (including 28 instructors, 4 program coordinators, 3 tutors, and 1 other); 27 of these also participated in focus-group interviews held in four communities. In addition, we interviewed all seven program administrators from the five rural centers.

Instructors. There was a wide range in the age of participants: 13.9% were between 20 and 30 years of age; 19.4% between 31 and 40; 22.2% between 41 and 50; 36.1% between 51 and 60; and 8.3% were 61 or over. The highest levels of education reported by the participants were as follows: undergraduate degree completed (44%), graduate degree completed (44%), graduate degree incomplete (6%), undergraduate incomplete (3%), and high school (3%). Educational

backgrounds were diverse: from early childhood specialist to handicap services to a bachelor's degree in political science and business administration to a doctorate in education. Whereas 44% percent of respondents reported no training in teaching ESL, 56% indicated some, ranging from attendance at Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language (ATESL) workshops to college coursework or a TESL diploma.

Many instructors were relatively new to the field; although 28% had taught ESL for over five years, 25% had only two to five years of experience, and 44% had been ESL instructors for less than two years (3% no response). Some of the respondents were full-time ESL instructors employed in daytime college programs, whereas others were part-time instructors teaching in daytime, evening, and weekend programs. Ninety-four percent were paid employees, and 6% were volunteers. On average, they worked 17 hours per week (range: 1.5-34.0 hours; median=18 hours). Sixty-one percent indicated that they worked as part of a team, 36% worked alone, and one person worked as a substitute ESL instructor. When asked how long they intended to continue teaching ESL, their responses ranged from 0.5 to 25 years (mean=7.6 years, median=5 years), reflecting similar responses to those in MacCormac and Kershaw's (2007) study. Twenty percent of the participants were members of their provincial teachers' associations, 10% were members of their local Community Adult Learning Council (CALC), and only 8% were members of ATESL.

The programs represented by instructors in this study offered a variety of classes tailored to meet the needs of immigrants, refugees, international students, and Canadian-born ESL learners (e.g., Mennonites and Hutterites). Twenty-six percent of the instructors worked in literacy programs, 20% in workplace English programs, 17% in Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs, and 9% in general ESL programs; the remaining 28% worked in international English, Enhanced Language Training (ELT) programs, Alberta Immigrant Nominee Programs (AINP, formerly the Provincial Nominee Program), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), Growing Literacy and Learning, and/or ESL drop-in centers.

Administrators. The seven administrators interviewed included LINC program coordinators, Executive Directors of CALCs, and college program administrators. They had a wide range of experience in their positions, from three months to 23 years; four of the seven had less than two years' experience. They managed a wide variety of part-time and full-time ESL programs (e.g., LINC, English in the Workplace, Business English, ELT, English for Specific Purposes, EAP, ESL for international students, and ESL Drop-in). In addition, they administered other programs such as literacy, family literacy, senior citizens' programming, employability enhancement, Volunteer Tutor Adult Literacy Services (VTALS), Citizenship and Immigration Canada host programs, and a variety of continuing education and in some cases college credit programs. Many of the administrators were in charge of all aspects of coordination from programming to curriculum, hiring, scheduling, purchasing equipment and resources, and testing and placement of new students into ESL programs.

Instruments

Three instruments were developed for data-collection: (a) a structured questionnaire designed to collect quantitative (Likert-type ratings and yes/no) and qualitative (open-ended) responses for the rural ESL instructor participants; (b) a semistructured focus-group interview guide for further in-depth exploration of instructors' views; and (c) a semistructured interview schedule for program administrators.

Instructors' questionnaire. The instructors' questionnaire was composed of 42 questions, 13 of which focused on the participants' work situation, experience, education, and professional affiliations. The remaining 29 questions were related to the instructors' program, resources, challenges, needs, motivation to engage in PD, topics of interest, and delivery preferences. For example, we asked them to rate the usefulness of the following 22 PD topics, using a scale from 1=*not at all useful* to 5=*extremely useful*: settlement adjustment issues of ESL immigrants; principles of language learning and teaching; TESL approaches and methodology (e.g., communicative language learning, task-based instruction, content-based instruction); teaching pronunciation; pedagogical grammar; LINC / Canadian Language Benchmarks; teaching English for academic purposes; teaching English for work purposes; teaching TOEFL Preparation; curriculum, materials and program development; placement and assessment methods; second language literacy; cross-cultural communication; activity-based learning (ESL warm-up games, icebreakers, tasks); classroom management and lesson planning; teaching reading and writing; teaching listening and speaking; computer-assisted language learning; music and video for language learning; teaching practicum experience; teaching multi-level classes; and teaching different age levels. Another question asked instructors to identify the instructional delivery methods for which they would register: intensive training (1-2 weeks) in or near their community; intensive training (1-2 weeks) in a large urban center; a series of one-day workshops; sessions at conferences; online learning; or other preferences.

Focus-group interview. Seven open-ended focus-group questions were developed for the instructors to explore in greater depth their responses to the questionnaire. Questions focused on their learners' needs; program resources; skills; PD needs, preferences, and supports; and perceptions of the benefits of professional development. For example, questions referring to their skills, PD needs, and training programs asked: What are the most important skills and experiences that instructors need to successfully teach the range of ESL learners in the program in which you teach? In your position as an ESL instructor (in this rapidly-changing field), what professional development needs do you have (i.e., what do you feel you need to learn to best meet the needs of your ESL learners)? What sorts of training programs would you like to see developed in order to meet your ongoing professional development needs?

Administrators' interview. Twenty-eight interview questions for program administrators were designed to elicit information about their program(s), learners, and resources; the need for expansion of services; current and desired qualifications of instructors; professional development opportunities available; further PD needs and preferences; and accessible PD supports. For example, questions referring to their PD needs and preferences asked: What PD needs do you and/or the instructors in your program have? What type of program would you/they be most likely to register for? What support would be available for ESL instructors in your program/region who wished to do professional development (e.g., course release, financial support, computer access, travel costs)? To what degree (available funding, etc.)?

Procedures

This research was a follow-up to a 2007 workshop organized by ATESL (ATESL, 2007) and an unpublished study funded by Alberta Employment and Immigration. Purposive sampling was employed to select rural communities in diverse geographic regions of the province that were

identified by government representatives as having experienced a large recent influx of immigrants requiring ESL instruction. We contacted ESL program administrators in those communities; they in turn provided access to instructors in their programs and encouraged staff to participate in follow-up focus-group interviews. The ESL instructors received a questionnaire that they were requested to complete before participating in the focus-group interviews; those who were unable to attend the focus groups were asked to return their completed questionnaires in the stamped, addressed envelope provided. The completion rate was 88%.

The purpose of the focus-group interviews was to gather more detailed information about the PD needs of ESL instructors in smaller communities in Alberta. Before the interviews began, the participants were asked to sign a consent form. Because a group rather than an individual was asked to respond to questions, participants could expand on the comments of others and add richness to the dialogue, which could not be achieved through the questionnaires or one-on-one interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). They were encouraged to share their points of view even if their answers differed from those of others, and they were assured that there were no right or wrong answers to the focus-group questions. Each of the focus-group interviews lasted approximately two hours and was conducted with six to eight participants; refreshments were provided for each group.

Six of the program administrators participated in telephone interviews, and one interview was conducted in person; each completed a consent form. Each interview lasted approximately one to one and a half hours. Interviews with all participants were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The first author conducted all instructor focus-group and administrator interviews.

Data Analysis

The instructors' responses to Likert-type and yes/no questions were entered into *SPSS* 16.0 and verified for accuracy. Frequencies and descriptive statistics were calculated for each of these. The open-ended question responses were entered into *Excel*, and then an iterative process was used to categorize and thematically classify the data for each question (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In several rounds of reading and analyzing the transcripts, salient themes were (a) noted in each transcript, (b) confirmed or refuted in the other transcripts, (c) classified, and then (d) quantified by counting the number of participants who provided similar answers. This method of multiple readings and constant comparison by five readers throughout the analyses ensured thematic consistency and accurate representations of the participants' responses. The administrators' interviews and instructors' focus-group interviews were also iteratively analyzed for recurring patterns and relationships between the instructors' and administrators' responses.

Results and Discussion

The aim of this study was to describe ESL program administrators' and instructors' views related to PD needs, interests, coordination and delivery of PD programs, and any other issues associated with the provision of PD in rural Alberta. The findings from the questionnaires and interviews are reported below in percentages for the most part, as answers to some questions were not provided by all the participants. Percentages also allow for clearer comparisons of administrators' and instructors' views.

Need for ESL Instruction in Rural Communities

All administrators and 97% of instructors indicated that there was a moderate-to-high need for ESL instruction in their community. When asked to rate the need for ESL instruction on a scale of 1-5 (1=*little need*, 5=*high need*), 50% of the instructors indicated a high need, 28% a moderately high need, 19% a moderate need, and one instructor (3%) was unsure of the need. Similarly, four (57%) of the seven administrators rated the need for ESL instruction in their communities as high (one described it as "desperately high"), one (14%) rated the need as moderately high to high, and two (29%) rated it as moderately high. This trend is likely to continue while immigration numbers remain high.

Instructors' Need for Formal TESL Training

All seven administrators (100%) rated the need for formal ESL training for people who deliver ESL instruction in their communities as moderately high to high. Those who expressed a high need stated that they had mostly instructors who were new to ESL, with limited TESL training and experience. In comparison, when the instructors were asked about the need for formal TESL training in their communities, 59% rated the need as high, 22% as moderate, and 6% as low. Despite the perceived need for formal TESL training, 21% of instructors reported that they had not had the opportunity to participate in any professional development activities, whereas 31% had attended at least one workshop, but only 14% had attended an ATESL conference. These statistics are disappointing as 44% of the instructors in this study were novice instructors with less than two years of teaching experience and no training in ESL.

Specific Content Focus of PD

Our research revealed a number of areas of needed growth. Instructors rated the perceived usefulness of PD topics using a 5-point scale (1=*not at all useful*; 5=*extremely useful*) and were allowed to rate more than one topic. The topics that were rated as either *useful* or *extremely useful* were activity-based learning (e.g., ESL warm-ups, icebreakers, tasks, 75%); teaching English for work purposes (67%); teaching multi-level classes (61%); curriculum materials and program development (61%); teaching pronunciation (58%); and placement and assessment methods (53%).

Program administrators identified the following as PD priorities for their instructors: curriculum/materials development (57%); program management/programming (43%); understanding LINC programming (43%); lesson planning (43%); assessment training (29%); and cultural sensitivity training (29%). Seventy-one percent of administrators indicated a need for instructors to have a solid foundation in influential theories of language-learning and second language acquisition (SLA). This finding is consistent with the notion that ESL instructors' PD should promote a thorough understanding of language and literacy (Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2000). In contrast, the instructors were less supportive of the need for theoretical knowledge; they indicated a preference for practical teaching strategies of direct relevance to the classroom.

Although many of the PD needs expressed by the instructors were similar to those articulated by the program administrators, a key issue not identified by the instructors but emphasized by the administrators was a need for PD related to program management and programming. This suggests that the program administrators have a broader conceptualization

of PD than the instructors. The challenge to rural organizations that provide ESL instruction, then, is to design PD experiences that are seen to benefit both the instructor and the organization.

Broader Issues

Several issues identified exclusively by administrators included (a) difficulties associated with attracting and retaining qualified staff who are interested in PD; (b) a need for increased funding to cover PD costs; (c) difficulties associated with selecting, coordinating, and delivering PD programming; and (d) a desire for increased communication/networking with representatives of government and other ESL programs throughout the province to enhance instructor PD. These concerns are addressed in greater detail below.

Attracting and retaining qualified staff. The program administrators indicated that rural organizations find it difficult to recruit and retain instructors with ESL qualifications. Because half of the rural instructors surveyed plan to leave the field within five years, this problem is likely to continue. The administrators in this study indicated that between 50% and 100% of the instructors or tutors in their programs would be interested in further PD (median=90-95%). Although continued PD may be considered a professional responsibility, many rural ESL instructors are hired on low-paying, temporary contracts and teach for only a few hours each week, so many are not willing to invest much time or effort in improving their practice (Breshears, 2004). Other reasons perceived by administrators as affecting instructors' interest in PD opportunities included unwillingness to travel and lack of training opportunities with sufficiently specialized and diverse topics of interest (Crandall, 1993).

The instructors' responses confirmed perceptions of varying enthusiasm for engaging in PD. More than half (58%) of the 36 instructors expressed high interest in taking further TESL training; 28% were somewhat interested; and 11% indicated that they had no interest in further training (3% no response). When we asked the instructors to identify factors that influenced their decision to engage in further professional development, they cited cost/financial support (11%), availability of courses (6%), recognition of training by employers (6%), course content (3%), location (3%), time (3%), type of instruction (3%), and quality of instruction (3%). Sixty-nine percent of instructors stated that they would like to be able to receive some form of recognition (accreditation, certification) from a professional organization for PD activities. Further issues raised by the instructors were related to planning/preparation time and professionalism. For example, one instructor stated, "stay[ing] current decreases your planning [time]"; whereas another commented, "We don't have enough time … for planning. We don't get any prep time and it's being aware of what each individual student's needs are … so there's a lot more personal time [we put] into it." When discussing how PD can increase the professionalism of TESL, one instructor stated, "I think a lot of people have this misconception that anyone can teach ESL and that's probably why for example we aren't credit, we aren't real in the college because it's just ESL." These two benefits of professional development—reduced planning/preparation time and increased professionalism—were not mentioned by administrators in their interviews. Unlike the instructors, the administrators emphasized the importance of PD for enhancing program accountability, which is reflective of institutional success (Gewirtz, 2002). It was their view that qualified ESL instructors would better meet programming needs and attract greater numbers of students.

PD funding/support. The instructors were asked to choose from a list of the conditions that needed to exist to encourage their participation in PD; they were allowed multiple responses. The identified supports included reasonable cost (67%), employer subsidy (64%), travel bursary (39%), salary increments (36%), Internet access (36%), computer access (28%), and affordable accommodation (19%). Of 15 participants who answered a question about willingness to pay personally for a formal professional development program (in online, blended, or other formats), only four were willing to pay more than $1,000; three were willing to pay between $800 and $1,000; five were willing to pay up to $500; and three were not willing to pay at all (mean=$792, median=$500). Data collected in the focus-group discussions suggest that the instructors who did not answer the question were either not interested in enrolling in a formal PD program or not willing or able to pay for it. One instructor's comment that reflected this was:

> I'd like to learn more but I'm not prepared to learn more if it's not going to mean an increase in pay or if it's not going to be paid for because … compared to a teacher's salary, we don't get paid anywhere near that.

Availability of funding support appeared to be one of the greatest barriers to further PD.

For all administrators too, a key consideration when planning PD was cost, including financial support for the training, wages for the training period, and travel expenses. Support for PD activities ranged from no funding at all to $2,000 per ESL instructor per year. Three programs paid fees for annual conferences; one paid wages for conference attendance. However, the other program administrators indicated that they did not even have enough PD funding to send their instructors to a TESL conference annually given the high cost of travel and accommodation for rural conference participants. Only two program administrators indicated that funds were available for travel. One administrator did not organize in-house training, but provided her full-time instructors with a small amount of PD funding ($500 per year) to attend provincial conferences (e.g., Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language Conference) or to save up over the years for an international conference (e.g., Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages Conference). However, conference attendance once every few years is not an effective model of ongoing professional development.

Other administrators did not provide individual funding, but reported offering local workshops or other forms of on-site group training such as Essential Skills required for work, learning, and life (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2009). Although five interviewees (71%) indicated that their programs covered on-site training and local workshop costs, only three (43%) reported that their instructors were paid while attending on-site or local training. One administrator stated that this latter practice had since been discontinued because "it is getting too expensive." Interestingly, only three of the seven administrators (43%) had provided any local professional development in the previous year. This may reflect a lack of local expertise, funding, or even commitment.

Selecting, coordinating, and delivering PD programming. When asked what type of PD program they would register for, 50% of the 36 instructors said that they would be interested in a certificate program (approximately 100 hours), 25% (9 instructors) in a diploma program (approximately 250 hours); and 17% (6 instructors) indicated other programming preferences (e.g., individual workshops, university courses). Three instructors did not respond to this question. The favored time frame for TESL training was one year for 58% of respondents; two

years for 22%; and either one or two years for 6% of participants (14% no response). Whereas 14% of respondents preferred distance education and 6% face-to-face instruction, 61% preferred a combination of face-to-face and distance education, and 19% indicated no preference. When asked to choose the instructional delivery method for which they would register, the preferences were as follows: intensive training (1-2 weeks) in or near their communities (61% indicated yes); a series of one-day workshops (47%); online learning (44%); sessions at conferences (31%); and intensive training (1-2 weeks) in an large urban center (31%). The open-ended question about the *ideal* schedule for respondents again elicited a wide range of responses: 11% stated evenings, 11% summer, 8% daytime, and 6% spring break, among others; the remaining responses were more idiosyncratic. Based on these responses, it would be difficult to design one PD program to satisfy all these preferences.

When asked which factors needed to be considered when designing rural ESL instructor PD programs, the administrators identified many of the same issues: location/accessibility, length of training, type of delivery, scheduling, access to computers and videoconferencing, professional certification and recognition, access to child care, and not least, instructors' willingness to participate.

Three program administrators emphasized that PD for novice instructors takes place largely on the job; however, in our opinion, if local instructors or administrators with ESL expertise are not available to guide those new to the field, guidance must be sought elsewhere. For example, two of the program administrators were unaware of provincial TESL PD opportunities, as their expertise was outside the field. Because they had a wide range of administrative responsibilities with multiple demands related to managing a large number of programs, these two participants understood the needs and PD interests of neither their ESL instructors nor the TESL profession in general. In addition, these two administrators underestimated the PD needs that were identified by their instructors. These findings support the need for (a) PD programs designed by instructors for instructors (Sparks & Hirsch, 1997); (b) effective leadership (O'Hara & Pritchard, 2008); and (c) professional development that enhances administrators' understanding of ESL instructors' roles and needs.

The diversity of responses from both the instructors and administrators revealed the complexity of selecting, coordinating, and delivering appropriate PD programs for rural ESL instructors in Alberta. None of the administrators in this study reported having strategic plans for PD, and few had access to local TESL expertise. Our findings suggest that a learner-centered approach to PD would best meet the varied interests and needs of instructors who are at later stages in their careers and who have diverse educational backgrounds and teaching experiences. Self-directed approaches to professional learning that promote ownership and allow instructors to explore and evaluate their practice more critically need to be fostered (Davison, 2001).

Increased communication/networking. The problem posed by the reported lack of long-term PD plans in most rural organizations was compounded by a corresponding lack of informal professional development practices (e.g., discussions with colleagues, in-house PD). An important question for rural program administrators is, therefore, how they can make an individualistic, working culture more collective and strategic to prevent instructors' isolation and to foster professional growth.

Our findings support the research that indicates that professional learning has a strong social dimension (Davidson, 2001; Sparks & Hirsch, 1997; Wenger & Snyder, 2000), as the instructors indicated that they preferred PD offered in face-to-face sessions. The instructors emphasized the importance of longer-term collaborative efforts such as building discourse

communities focused on teaching and learning (Putnam & Borko, 2000). Mentorship and knowledge-sharing by administrators and other instructors were forms of professional development that appealed to the instructors in this study. For example, many of the instructors found the focus-group interview an excellent source of PD; most reported insufficient opportunities for face-to-face interaction and for informal collaborative practices to learn from other instructors' experiences. Because they were not provided with paid opportunities to share their knowledge with one another, many instructors were unwilling to spend the time to build local communities of practice. Strong communities of practice rely, however, on key additional factors such as an expert knowledge base. Without this, relying on internal on-the-job types of professional development activities will probably prove unsuccessful.

Recommendations for TESL PD

Based on our findings and in response to issues that were raised by the participants, we provide the following recommendations to assist in creating a holistic, effective, relevant PD experience for rural adult ESL programs.

1. Establish an inter-agency committee (if one does not currently exist) in the community to facilitate the sharing of information and issues of services and resources to support newcomers in the community. Communicate information to staff as it becomes available.
2. Develop with the entire program staff a shared, holistic understanding of the ESL program: its mandate, stakeholders, funding sources, allocation of resources, and ESL needs and issues in the community, and update them as changes occur. This will ensure that all staff recognize the full range of competing demands at all levels of the program.
3. Prioritize both short- and long-term PD goals in collaboration with stakeholders based on a holistic needs assessment of the organization and its instructors and learners.
4. Motivate and, when possible, provide funding for instructors to become affiliated with professional TESL association(s) and to attend and/or volunteer at TESL conferences annually.
5. Explore opportunities to partner with similar ESL programs throughout the province to share knowledge, experience, workshops, PD resources, and so forth.
6. Encourage instructors to gain knowledge of the languages of their students, as well as their cultures (ATESL Resources at http://www.atesl.ca/cmsms/resources/) and any settlement adjustment challenges that they or their families may be experiencing.
7. Contact professional associations, government agencies, and other organizations (e.g., Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks) to identify experts and resources to assist in the development of curricula, materials, and assessments to meet the needs of the program. The ATESL Curriculum Framework Project will provide a framework to support adult ESL teaching, learning, and assessment and to facilitate program development or renewal (*ATESL Newsletter*, June 2010).
8. Facilitate development of a deeper understanding of the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) and CLB materials and assessments within programs (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks Registry of Experts, Professional Development Services, http://www.language.ca/display_page.asp?page_id=386).

9. Schedule PD time to adapt sample (CLB) lesson plans to create a database of lessons designed to meet the curricular objectives of the program.

10. Provide access to quality online PD resources (e.g., CLB and other PD modules, TESL-related publications, courses, podcasts, webcasts, etc.). The ATESL Resources Database (http://www.atesl.ca/Resources/), for example, will provide annotated information for improving instruction and/or developing new programs.

11. Facilitate instructors' collaboration and sharing of ideas and resources.

12. Organize professional reading groups for teachers in the community (to discuss relevant journal/newsletter articles, books, and other print or online resources).

13. Create local or online instructor mentoring pairs or teams to provide novice instructors with guidance and support and to promote collaborative teacher learning communities that support PD goals.

14. Facilitate the organization and sponsorship of a series of local workshops and/or mini-conferences that address PD program goals and topics of need/interest. Develop follow-up activities to reinforce these local sessions: sharing knowledge, critically reflecting on and implementing best practices (see ATESL, 2009, *Best Practices for Adult ESL and LINC Programming in Alberta*).

15. Encourage instructors to enroll in accredited TESL programs (see ATESL and TESL Canada Web sites) and when possible provide funding for successful course completion.

16. Encourage and when possible provide funding and/or information about funding opportunities (e.g., ATESL bursaries) to enable instructors to share their knowledge and experience at TESL conferences.

17. Provide recognition and reward/compensation for PD activities as well as fair remuneration for teaching.

18. Conduct periodic and annual evaluations [using a range of measures collected from multiple sources (Schaetzel et al., 2007)] to assess the quality and effectiveness of the organization's PD program and activities and to identify ongoing needs. Use the results to develop and extend the organization's professional development program.

Conclusion

Further research is needed to determine which types of programming and which elements of PD best support rural adult ESL instructors' efforts to improve their instructional practices and to enhance ESL learners' language proficiency. Studies are also required (a) to assess the capabilities of providers to train individuals to meet the needs of ESL learners in regions where qualified TESL professionals are not available; and (b) to identify effective incentives for encouraging participation in PD activities.

One important implication stemming from the small, purposeful sample and its specificity of context is that attempts to relate the findings to other program administrators and/or instructors outside the rural Alberta context should be made cautiously. Although the questionnaire response rate was high (88%) and we sampled widely throughout the province, there may be communities with unique needs that are not represented by those in this study. Nonetheless, we believe that the participants' characteristics generally reflect those of rural instructors throughout the province: 94% of the respondents were female, and 67% were over

the age of 40. The participants' characteristics are not notably different from those found in a recent ATESL survey where 87% of the respondents were female and 74% were over 40 years of age. Overall, the themes that emerged from the questionnaires and interview data in our study were common across communities. As a result, our findings may resonate with rural ESL program administrators and instructors throughout the country and address some of their needs and concerns at regional and local levels.

Our findings highlight the importance of ESL instructors' PD and its practices, specifically in rural Alberta. It is particularly crucial that ESL instructors with limited TESL training have access to PD opportunities to acquire new pedagogical skills and deepen their knowledge of language and TESL. In order to develop or maintain quality adult ESL programs, program administrators need to work with stakeholders to design and implement strategic PD plans that are directly relevant to instructors' and program needs. The success of a PD program is also related to time commitments, resource commitments, access, use of time and resources, quality of PD, and willingness to participate in PD. Incentives are needed to support and encourage professional growth (long-term, locally-based, collaborative, and linked to curricula). In particular, to increase participation in PD activities, rural organizations need to focus on using and/or developing PD programs more systematically to meet instructors' needs, interests, and preferences. The recommendations in this article provide possible starting points for building PD capacity and specific areas to consider when developing PD plans for rural adult ESL programs.

Although the federal and provincial governments purport to value PD for ESL instructors, a greater investment of resources is required to develop and retain qualified ESL instructors, particularly in rural areas. Many rural ESL program administrators and instructors lack awareness of and/or access to the support or resources that they require to provide quality instruction for immigrants who need English-language training. Greater access to contextually appropriate PD for ESL instructors across the province will improve the ability of centers to offer effective, targeted instruction (e.g., ESL for daily living, technical English, cross-cultural communication skills) and information on services available to address the varying needs of the newcomers in their communities. This in turn will facilitate the integration of immigrants and their families and enhance their participation in the communities where they settle. Furthermore, effective ESL instruction will improve the workplace health and safety of learners and provide the language skills necessary for further occupational training. Ultimately, the enhancement of ESL teaching and learning in rural areas will create more welcoming communities for immigrants and refugees and support government initiatives to attract and retain newcomers.

Acknowledgments

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