Final Report of the Program Evaluation of the mRLC

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Manitoba Rural Learning Consortium

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Executive Summary

This report is the third and final program evaluation report as part of the three-year program evaluation plan of the mRLC. The evaluation explored an overarching question on the extent to which the mRLC had achieved its goal of collaborative, innovative professional development support of rural educators and school divisions. Two sub-questions explored administrative, organizational and professional development activities and networking opportunities.

Data sources used to respond to these questions included participant and superintendent surveys, feedback slips from PD session participants, and facilitator reports and interviews. Based on these data sources, the major conclusions from the program evaluation are that:

- the mRLC has made significant progress since its inception in 2011, to becoming a network cooperative providing PD programs and services to rural school divisions.
- the mRLC has consistently engaged in collaborative process and maintained its focus on meeting the needs of rural school divisions and educators.
- greater attention and focus needs to be given to Aboriginal and at-risk learners.
- the mRLC's foundations of collaborative inquiry approach and the establishment of learning networks are excellent models of innovative, professional learning. That said, not all of the facilitators and participants have 'bought into' or understand the foundations of learning networks and collaborative inquiry.

An overarching recommendation of the program evaluation is that the mRLC continue its efforts to provide innovative and collaborative leadership for professional development services for rural school divisions and educators. Based on this recommendation, we add four supplemental recommendations to the mRLC. We recommend that the mRLC

1. sustain its foundations of collaborative inquiry approach, action research and learning networks.
2. enhance and monitor organizational details.
3. enhance its focus on Aboriginal and at-risk learners.
4. identify and/or develop measurements of effectiveness of mRLC's professional learning programs.

Introduction

The mRLC's mandate is to provide collaborative, innovative professional learning services to rural school divisions and educators. This mandate and by extension this program evaluation, include two considerations. The first is the unique circumstances of rural school divisions in Manitoba. The second is the nature of professional development for teachers. While both of these considerations are highly relevant to this program evaluation, they are also large and complex. The following sections are intended to alert readers to these considerations but should not be considered as exhaustive descriptions.

Challenges for Rural School Divisions in Manitoba

Rural school divisions face specific challenges that differentiate them from their urban counterparts. These include isolation, limited resources, community resistance to change, rapid and frequent turnover of professional and support staff, transportation costs and infrastructure maintenance (Lamkin, 2006). Current societal conditions such as increased accountability, parent and community involvement, and competing demands for public funds exacerbate all of these challenges.

With specific reference to Manitoba, the discussion paper, *Rural Education in Manitoba: Defining Challenges, Creating Solutions*, prepared by the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, Manitoba Association of School Trustees in 2006, identified the following five major challenges for rural school divisions:

1. social values and attitudes toward public education,
2. infrastructure needs for facilities,
3. technology and transportation systems,
4. recruitment and retention of qualified staff, and
5. jurisdictional and policy issues.

The mRLC's effort to provide professional learning services is most closely connected to the challenge of recruitment and retention of qualified staff. For rural areas this challenge is mitigated by:

- provision of amenities offered by larger, more urban divisions;
- on-going changes in teaching assignments; and
- fewer collaborative opportunities to develop or participate in professional learning communities (Manitoba Association of

School Superintendents, Manitoba Association of School
Trustees, 2006).

Teacher Professional Development

The professional development of teachers is widely considered as the key mechanism for improving classroom instruction and ultimately, student achievement (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss & Shapley, 2007). By extension, educators and professional development service providers assume that there will be a clear relationship between teacher professional development and student achievement. Furthermore, there is also an assumption that there are readily available and easy-to-use measurements of the effects of professional development on student learning.

According to the literature, both of these assumptions have limitations particularly for traditional forms of teacher professional development. Firstly, while much is known about the nature of knowledge and learning in terms of students, much less attention has been paid to teachers as learners (Grossman & McDonald, 2008; Putnam & Borko, 2000).

Secondly, there is relatively little theoretical grounding and much less research on the connection between professional development of teachers and the impact on student learning (Coggshall, Rasmussen, Colton, Milton, & Jacques, 2012; Loucks-Horsely & Matsumoto, 1999; Yoon et al., 2007). For example, after examining more than 1300 studies as potentially addressing the effect of teacher professional development on student achievement in the content areas of math, science and reading/English language arts, Yoon et al. (2007) stated there was (a) a paucity of rigorous studies that directly assess the effect of teacher professional development on student achievement; and (b) a wide range of variability in the types of measurements used and the interpretation of results.

In contrast to these limitations, there is a considerable body of literature describing several important characteristics of meaningful professional learning. Bruce and Flynn (2013) reviewed several studies and summarized these characteristics as:

- active inquiry in which teachers develop their understanding of (content) concepts;
- reflection and analysis of examples of classroom practice;
- collaboration among teachers while they are engaged in professional learning;

- a professional learning facilitator modeling exemplary practice;
- in-school application of professional learning ideas followed by feedback and reflection;
- a focus on appropriate content and how to teach it;
- a focus on student learning; and,
- teacher choice in identifying professional learning needs and methods of delivery.

These qualities of meaningful professional learning are found in the collaborative inquiry approach, which is a foundation of the mRLC's approach to its professional development services. Collaborative inquiry has emerged as an alternative to traditional, stand-and-deliver, episodes of teacher professional development. Collaborative inquiry is a process that is situated in teacher practice and involves sustained and recurring cycles of planning, action, use of evidence and research to create new knowledge and action (Putnam & Borko, 2000; Wellman & Lipton, 2004).

As well, collaborative inquiry places educators in the role of actively constructing professional knowledge by using their own practice as well as their classrooms or schools as sites of planned investigation (Wellman & Lipton, 2004).

A final distinction between traditional, stand-and-deliver professional development and collaborative inquiry is that there appears to be a growing body of theoretical and empirical support for collaboration and collaborative inquiry (Borko, 2004).

Since its establishment in 2011, the mRLC has promoted the establishment of learning networks across and between rural school divisions. The foundation of the mRLC's learning networks is collaborative inquiry and action research. These are inter-related, and arguably synonymous, iterative processes that involve:

- the examination and reflection of existing practice;
- new learning through the lens of prior knowledge, data collection and research;
- demonstrated application of new knowledge; and
- re-examination of the impact of the new knowledge on professional practice.

According to Wellman and Lipton (2004), the heart of collaborative inquiry is the collective exploration and analysis of data.

Challenges to Determining the Impact of Collaborative Inquiry

The evaluator found that there are two overarching challenges to determining the impact of the collaborative inquiry approach to professional development. The first challenge is to establish a distinction between the collaborative inquiry approach and teacher collaboration. The second challenge is the selection and use of measurements or indicators of the collaborative inquiry approach to professional development.

Collaborative Inquiry Approach versus Teacher Collaboration

Plainly stated, the meanings and intents behind the collaborative inquiry approach and teacher collaboration are different. However, the program evaluator found many examples across the literature where scholars and researchers used the terms synonymously. (Note: participants and several facilitators in the mRLC's professional development sessions also used the terms synonymously.)

For this program evaluation, the evaluator considered collaborative inquiry approach to be an articulated, cyclical process such as the one described by Wellman and Lipton (2004). The place 'where the rubber hits the road' on the distinction between these collaborative inquiry approach and teacher collaboration is the selection and use of indicators of the impact of collaborative inquiry professional development.

Professional Development and Student Achievement: Muddy Linkages

One of the hallmarks of belonging in a 'profession' is participation in on-going professional development. For teacher professional development there is an underlying expectation that professional development will affect student achievement through three steps:

> *Step 1: High-quality foundations and organization:* The professional development activity is high quality in its delivery, subject content, clear and articulated objectives, and it is strongly implemented. Content and actions are carefully constructed using theoretical foundations and empirical evidence. The activity should also promote and extend curriculum and instruction including articulated actions for using new knowledge.

Step 2: Motivation for teachers: Assuming that the professional development is high-quality, teachers must have the motivation, beliefs, skills and opportunities to adopt new practices. This is best achieved by on-going school or network collaborations and access to experts.

Step 3: Application: High-quality foundations and motivation for teachers find their way into teaching practice and ultimately, student achievement.

The challenge for professional development is to identify and document clear lines that link teacher professional learning to classroom practice and student learning (Kubitskey & Fishman, 2004; Loucks-Horsely & Matsumoto, 1999; Yoon et al., 2007).

This muddy linkage is not the result of lack of effort. Rather, the difficulties in identifying and making clear connections arise from the inherent complexities of the sphere of influences or mediating factors on student learning outcomes. Loucks-Horsely and Matsumoto (1999) stated, with reference to Guskey and Sparks, that these influences include quality staff development, administrator support, and the knowledge and practices of teachers and parents.

In their research of 1300 studies that potentially addressed the effect of teacher professional development on student learning, Yoon et al. (2007) found that there were few rigorous studies that explicitly addressed the effect of professional development on student achievement. Their review indicated that the clear connection between teacher professional development and student learning is complex and mediated by "teacher knowledge and practice in the classroom and that professional development takes place in the context of high standards, challenging curricula, system-wide accountability, and high-stakes assessments' (p. 4).

As Loucks-Horsely and Matsumoto (1999) concluded

establishing a clear link between professional development and improved student learning – if one actually can be made – requires substantial research and evaluation that carefully account for the various contributions that each factor makes to the desired outcome. (p. 258)

The challenge of making direct linkages between teacher professional development and student achievement is exacerbated by the nature and quality of the empirical evidence used to validate the effects of

professional development. Yoon et al. (2007) suggested that the evidence should be based, at a minimum, on the following four characteristics:

1. rigorous research design including randomized controls that can rule out competing explanations for gains in student achievement;
2. consistent professional development design echoed by consistent data collection and analysis;
3. the properties of the measurements should be valid, reliable, age-appropriate, and aligned to the intervention;
4. research design and analysis are well-specified and appropriate.

We come now to the point of this discussion. Given these very challenging requirements for rigorous evidence on the link between teacher professional development and student achievement, and the nature of teachers, students, schools and financial resources, it is not surprising that there is no overarching set of accurate and efficient measurements for use by agencies such as the mRLC (Loucks-Horsley & Matsumoto, 1999; Yoon et al., 2007).

In spite of these limitations, across the literature it is clear that teacher professional development is valuable to teachers directly and students indirectly. It is also clear that teacher professional development sessions need to be high-quality, well-organized sessions grounded in theoretical foundations and empirical evidence and aimed at collaborative actions.

The Manitoba Rural Learning Consortium

In June of 2011, a group of experienced educators from rural Manitoba initiated the Manitoba Rural Learning Consortium (mRLC), a three-year pilot project dedicated to providing collaborative, innovative professional learning services to rural school divisions and educators. The goal of the mRLC was to be a collaborative, non-governmental, non-profit organization designed to support students, teachers, principals, support services staff, superintendents, and school boards in rural Manitoba.

The mRLC works across and within school divisions with a focus on consultation, coaching and collaboration. School divisions commit to the network by purchasing a membership and engaging in network activities.

Key Features of the mRLC

Based on mRLC website and other documentation, the consortium describes itself as:

- An education partner dedicated to providing collaborative, innovative support for rural educators to improve learning for all students with a particular focus on Aboriginal and at-risk learners.

- A collaborative, non-government, non-profit organization designed to support students, teachers, principals, support services staff, superintendents, and school boards in rural Manitoba.

- A learning network focused on building capacity, designing processes to support implementation and developing products that enhance learning.

- A co-operative owned and managed by its members to meet their mutual needs. Costs are shared between school divisions. The mRLC also receives year-to-year funding from Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning.
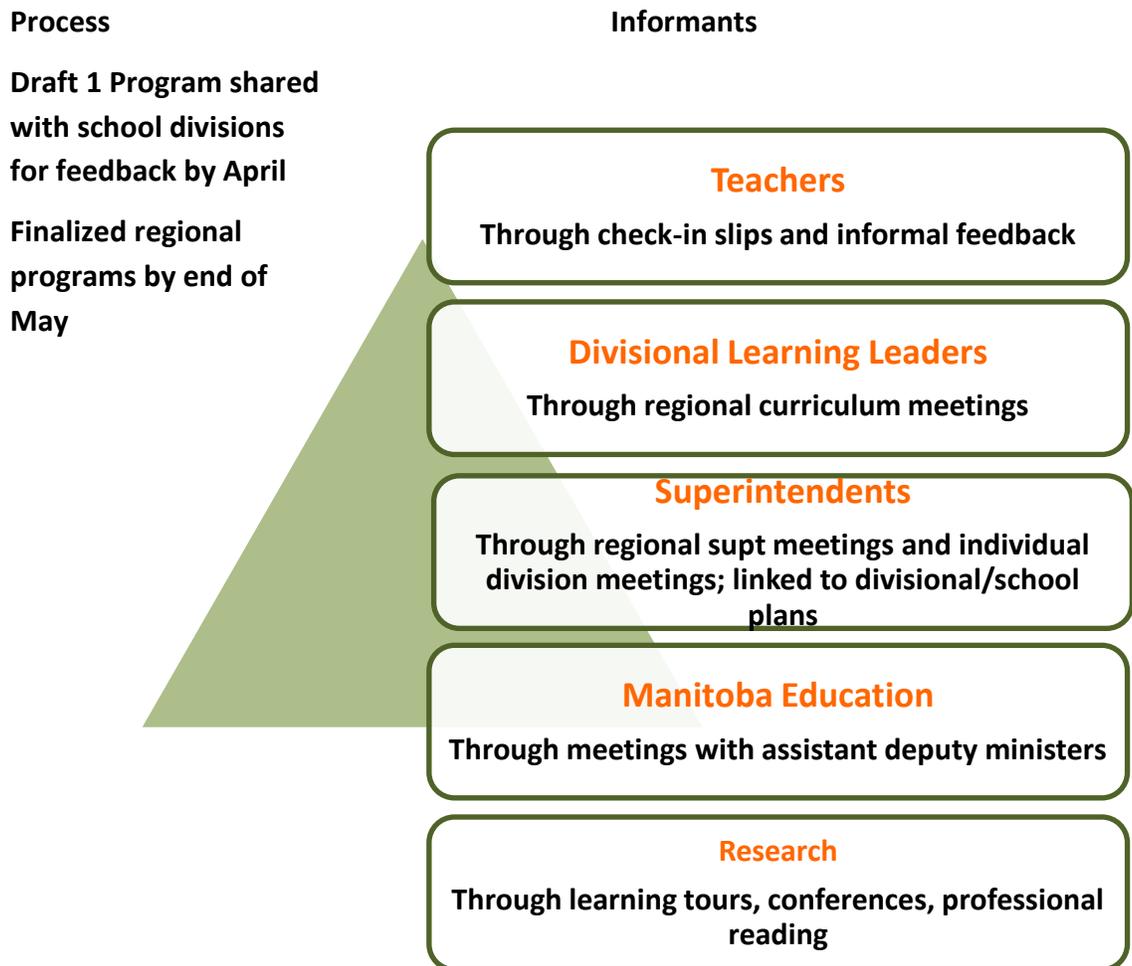
mRLC Programs and Services

According to the mRLC, the mRLC co-Directors identify needs for programs and services through a series of consultations and feedback loops with divisional learning leaders, superintendents, assistant deputy

ministers in Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, and the mRLC Board.

The co-Directors also rely on the check-in or feedback documents and their own professional development activities. The process begins in January and culminates in the program of services in May for implementation in the following September. According to the co-Directors, the program of service delivery is co-constructed and based on collective needs as identified by teachers, divisional learning leaders, superintendents, Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, and research (Figure 1).

Figure 1:

Process

Draft 1 Program shared with school divisions for feedback by April

Finalized regional programs by end of May

Informants

Teachers

Through check-in slips and informal feedback

Divisional Learning Leaders

Through regional curriculum meetings

Superintendents

Through regional supt meetings and individual division meetings; linked to divisional/school plans

Manitoba Education

Through meetings with assistant deputy ministers

Research

Through learning tours, conferences, professional reading

Program Evaluation Framework

This report is the third and final program evaluation report as part of the three-year program evaluation plan of the Manitoba Rural Learning Consortium (mRLC). The mRLC identified that formative and summative program evaluations were essential components in helping the organization achieve its goal and objectives.

The evaluation framework included the following three phases:

1. An implementation evaluation report for year 1 (2011-12) for the co-Directors and the Board;

2. An interim report for year 2 (2012-2013) for the co-Directors and the Board; and

3. A final, summative report for year 3 (2014) to all the partnerships in the learning consortium.

The evaluation did not examine any financial arrangements between the mRLC, its partners or member organizations, or consultants undertaking work on behalf of the mRLC lot program.

The Centre for Aboriginal and Rural Education Studies (CARES) in the Faculty of Education, Brandon University acted as the external program evaluator for all three phases of the program evaluation.

The role of the external program evaluator was to direct and facilitate the collection of evaluation data, analyze the evaluation data and prepare the implementation, interim and final evaluation reports.

Program Evaluation Question

The purpose of the program evaluation was to evaluate to what extent the mRLC, as an organization, was delivering high quality, professional learning services to rural Manitoba teachers and school divisions.

The overarching evaluation question was:

> *To what extent has the mRLC, as a network cooperative, achieved its goal of providing collaborative, innovative support for rural educators in order to improve learning for all students with a particular focus on Aboriginal and at-risk learners?*

The sub-questions of the evaluation included:

> *To what extent do the mRLC's administrative, organizational and professional development activities contribute to building capacity?*

> *To what extent are the networking opportunities promoted by the mRLC building capacity?*

Limitations of the Program Evaluation

A limitation to this program evaluation was that the participant survey was sent out prior to the formation and implementation of some of the learning networks.

Program Evaluation Methodology

Participants were teachers, facilitators, and school superintendents. The program methodology for the final program evaluation involved the following types of data collection and analysis.

Participant Survey

The CARES and the co-Directors of the mRLC prepared a survey that the CARES distributed by email to 281 individuals who had participated in mRLC sessions. The mRLC administrative staff provided the email addresses. The response rate was good (36%) (N=100).

The purpose of the survey was to gather information primarily on the outcomes of the mRLC programs and services as experienced by the participants. Findings from the participant surveys derived from interpretation of the descriptive statistical analyses are presented in Appendix A.

Superintendent Survey

The CARES and the co-Directors of the mRLC also prepared a superintendent survey. The survey was distributed by email to 25 superintendents of school divisions who are partners in the mRLC. Fourteen superintendents responded to the survey.

Superintendents are the chief administrative officers for their school divisions, therefore, the superintendent survey focused primarily on

operational dimensions of the mRLC. Findings from the survey of superintendents derived from interpretation of the descriptive statistical analyses are presented in Appendix B.

Feedback slips

The mRLC uses a standard, 1-page feedback or exit slip at the conclusion of each PD session. The slip consists of short, written answer responses to seven or eight open-ended questions. At the time of this program evaluation, there were 280 participant feedback slips from 38 professional development sessions.

As a source of data, there are limitations to this kind of data (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). Firstly, short texts are inefficient for finding themes beyond superficial observations. Secondly, the one-page set of questions implied short responses rather than more in-depth narratives.

Based on these limitations, the data analysis of the feedback slips consisted of word count frequencies (repetitions) and similarities and differences of word count frequencies between sets of feedback slips (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). The program evaluator used NVivo ™ qualitative data analysis software to analyse the report data. Where appropriate, some selected comments have been included in the report.

The summary of the word count frequencies for each question in the feedback slip is located in Appendix C.

Facilitators' Reports and Interviews

Seven of the facilitators of the professional development sessions completed a report comprised of eight questions. The evaluator also conducted three interviews with facilitators. The interviews were transcribed into verbatim texts. The program evaluator used NVivo ™ qualitative data analysis software to analyse the facilitators' reports and the textual data. Significant excerpts from these reports and texts have been inserted throughout the findings section.

Findings

The purpose of the program evaluation was to evaluate to what extent the mRLC, as an organization, was delivering high quality, professional learning services to rural Manitoba teachers and school divisions.

This section presents the program evaluator's interpretation of the findings from the data analysis. As a summative evaluation, the evaluator relied primarily on the information provided by the participants in the mRLC programs and services.

Throughout the findings, the program evaluator has included atypical comments that appear to undermine or contradict the survey results and/or the program evaluator's conclusions. The program evaluator has used these atypical comments to underline exceptions that are noteworthy of consideration. Simply put, they have been included to draw the mRLC's attention to valuable comments that may be helpful to the consortium.

At the time of this evaluation (and based on the findings of the participant survey), the mRLC participants were:

Classroom teachers (51%)	Assistant superintendents (5%)
Principals (34%)	Superintendents (2%)
Curriculum consultants (8%)	Learning support (1%)
Resource teachers (7%)	Other (8%, mostly Vice Principals)

The program evaluation findings that follow are based on the **critical dimensions** (identified **in bold**) of A. the overarching evaluation question and B. the sub-questions.

    A. Overarching question:

*To what extent has the mRLC, as a network cooperative, achieved its goal of **providing collaborative, innovative support** for rural educators in order to **improve learning for all students with a particular focus on Aboriginal and at-risk learners?***

    B. Sub-questions
*To what extent do the mRLC's **administrative, organizational and professional development activities contribute to building capacity?***

*To what extent are the **networking opportunities** promoted by the mRLC building capacity?*

Provision of Collaborative, Innovative Support

Respondents to the superintendent survey indicated that the most useful mRLC programs and services were in-person workshops (100%), mentoring and feedback (50%), consultation (36%), and webinars (36%). Respondents indicated a moderate to low use of website, tools, email, video conferences, and conference calls.

Respondents to the participant survey also indicated that in-person or professional development workshops were the most frequently used mRLC service (Table 1). Overall, these sessions were deemed as being effective or very effective.

Table 1: Use and effectiveness of mRLC's programs and services

Program, service and percentage of use	Effectiveness
In person workshops (95% use)	85% of respondents indicated very effective or effective
Website (30% use)	81% of respondents indicated very effective or effective
Email correspondence (20% use)	58% of respondents indicated very effective or effective; 38% indicated somewhat effective
Tools (17% use)	76% of respondents indicated that the mRLC's tools were very effective or effective
Video conferencing (15% use)	41% indicated that video conferencing was highly effective
Consultations, conference calls, webinars, mentoring	Less than 10% usage. Results inconclusive on effectiveness.

Collaboration is a key element to the mRLC and it comes in a variety of forms. With participants it is the opportunity to share and discuss. For example, with specific reference to the professional development sessions,

the word frequency analysis *(words italicized)* of the feedback slips indicated that the participants gained new *ideas* and appreciated the *discussions, questions*, and *sharing* with the *colleagues*. The words most commonly associated with the collaboration opportunities were *excellent* and *helpful learning process*. The comment from a survey respondent sums up the positive feedback

> *The PD with mRLC has been top-quality!*

Another respondent stated that

> *It's the best PD I've had in years.   We take this information, develop plc's (*professional learning communities) *and implement these practices in our own divisions.*

While the participants were keen on the opportunity to collaborate during the PD sessions, one of the facilitators talked about the collaboration of participants BEFORE the yearly plans for PD were established.

> *I think, we should be doing a survey of all* (network*) teachers in the participating school divisions and ask them to preselect a topic and they would know when they came to the first meeting in the fall. They would know what topic they were going to be primarily working on together.*

The positive findings for collaboration from the participant survey and the feedback slips are in contrast to the critical comments of the 15 % of the respondents who found that the PD sessions were only somewhat effective or not effective. As an atypical example of comments, one respondent added that

> *Educators are frustrated with curriculum documents that are voluminous in nature. We were sold on the mRLC being the answer to help facilitate the process of dissecting curriculum into useable documents. Teachers wanted to get to work but that did not occur. Mornings were repetitious and it became more about the theory of what we were trying to accomplish than actually accomplishing something.*

In terms of innovative support, the use of technology is arguably the most indicative measure of innovative. Table 1 (previous page) shows that there was a low use of all types of technology-based programs and services and there was a wide range in terms of effectiveness.

One facilitator saw the usefulness of technology to promote mentoring and learning networks but commented on the uptake by participants.

> *We offered technology but there was no uptake. Now I must say that I pushed the idea but I didn't push it hard because I wasn't sure about how well the technology was going to work for us. Now that we've used the technology I think I might be even doing more of that, particularly if we are more topic focused next year. We may come out with more of a working group kind of feel. If we do that then it would make sense to get together periodically for half hour or whatever to see how progress is going as people work towards doing; I'm hoping that they will sort of take on individual jobs or small group jobs in terms of getting certain information or pursuing contact with people or whatever.*

Improvement of Learning for All Students

While the mRLC's intention is to improve learning for all students, this intention is an indirect, long-term, progressive, and cumulative outcome. The evaluator did not find any explicit evidence directly connecting mRLC's programs and services to improved learning outcomes for students.

Changes and improvement to teaching practice can lead to improvement of learning for all students. Based on the participant survey, 1/3 of the respondents indicated that there was extensive or moderate change to their teaching practice as a result of mRLC's programs and services. Again, change and improvement in teaching practice takes time and results from multiple factors including school climate, motivation for change and ability to implement change.

Particular Focus on Aboriginal and At-Risk Youth

There were no questions in the participant or superintendent surveys which were specifically aimed at Aboriginal and at-risk youth. Both the feedback slips and facilitators' reports asked about the impact on Aboriginal and at-risk youth.

Based on the word frequency count, nearly 60% of the responses to this question on the feedback slips gave no response to this question. For the remainder, the highest word count frequencies were for the terms *engagement* and *inclusion* to all students. There were very few word counts for *Aboriginal* and none for the term *at-risk youth*. There was a

similar lack of specific references to Aboriginal and at-risk learners in the facilitators' reports and interviews.

Administrative, Organizational and PD Contributions

The mRLC's administrative contributions include the communication functions such as the website, use of email and conference calls. Organizational contributions include the timing and notice of sessions, facilities and meals. Professional development contributions include the kind and quality of information provided by facilitators.

Administrative Contributions

Communication tools:
Thirty percent (30%) of the respondents used the website and most of these (81%) considered the website to be very effective or effective. Notably, 20 % of the respondents used email but only 58% found that the mRLC's email functions were very effective or effective. About 1/3 of the survey respondents requested better and more timely information on the PD sessions. For example,

> *By the time we heard about the changes I was scrambling for teachers to go.*

The following comment from a survey respondent suggests that there is a communication gap in the range of the mRLC's programs and services.

> *I wasn't aware before doing this survey that they provided other services besides the workshops so it would be great if word got out about that more.*

One facilitator described the role of the divisions in the communication system.

> *It's sort of the cascade effect of the communication system. It's the way that information gets passed on to the participants, once the mRLC makes the divisions aware of what's available. It's how the divisions communicate about it.*

Organization of sessions:
The organization of programs and services includes the location, facilities, and meals. Just over 40% of the participant survey respondents asked the mRLC to improve the organization of the sessions and 36% asked for a more suitable location.

> *We need to have the dates set beforehand and not changed at the last minute. Change of dates prevented many of my colleagues from*

> *coming this year. Also lunch should be included in the price and there should be vegetarian options.*

In contrast to the participants, the superintendents and facilitators appeared to be pleased with the organization of the sessions. For example, as one superintendent stated that:

> *The organization has continually tried to improve its services. It's getting better on all fronts.*

A facilitator stated that he/she had positive experiences regarding the organizational details.

> *All arrangements were put in place, instructions about when and where to go were clear; solid communication, enthusiastic support and affirmation for what was happening.*

Professional Development Contributions

Based on the participant survey, mRLC professional development sessions comprise about 90% of the programs and services currently accessed by rural educators. A large majority of the survey respondents (85%) felt that the sessions were effective or very effective.

That said, the data from the participant survey data and the feedback slips suggest that the effectiveness of the PD sessions relates to (a) the type and quality of the information shared by the facilitators brought to the sessions and (b) the opportunity to share and collaborate.

More than one-third of the respondents preferred the mRLC professional development sessions to other PD experiences although half of the attendees reported that they did not see much difference between the mRLC professional development sessions and other PD experiences.

Type and quality of the information shared:
The participant survey asked respondents to comment on the type and quality of the information provided by their fellow participants and by the facilitators. Most (85%) of the survey respondents indicated that fellow participants in PD sessions mostly shared their personal experience, and knowledge and expertise, but most (again 85%) found that the *quality of the information* shared with was only good or moderately useful.

In contrast to the *kind of information* shared by the participants, the facilitators shared personal experience, knowledge and expertise, research

data and research reports. The quality of information provides another contrast: more than 88% of the respondents indicated that the *quality of the information* shared by the facilitators was either good or high quality.

Opportunities to share and collaborate:
Word frequency analysis of the feedback slips and comments from the respondents to the participant survey show that the participants viewed the PD sessions as an *opportunity* to share their experiences with others.

The enthusiasm of the PD participants to share experiences raises a flag in light of the collaborative inquiry approach promoted by the mRLC. Specifically, sharing information and experiences is only one step in the establishment of learning networks, the collaborative inquiry approach and action research. As one facilitator stated:

> *The biggest challenge was to balance information on the principles behind Backwards Planning and provide opportunities for collaborative inquiry. Without a solid understanding of the three stages of Backwards Planning, collaborative work could easily slip into a sharing session of learning activities.*

Another facilitator offered a similar perspective:

> *The ideal is collaborative inquiry and it is aimed at finding evidence as it is available to help guide our own work. And I've been concerned because teachers like the opportunity to talk with each other and learn from each other's practice, but there has not been the quality research. That's one of the reasons and maybe the main reasons why I would like to see what would happen if we chose a topic ahead of time and went at it with the idea of saying "We're going to focus on this now. What are the best sources that we can be bringing back for subsequent meetings?" So yes we do need to do more work in that area.*

Contributions to Building Capacity

The mRLC's programs and services are clearly aimed at building leadership and teaching capacity in order to improve student learning.

Impact on Teaching and Leadership

Based on the participant survey, about one-third (32%) of the respondents indicated that there had been moderate to extensive change to their

teaching and/or leadership practice. Two-thirds (66%) indicated that there was small to no change in their teaching practice.

Examples of the impact include:

I had already incorporated quite a few of these practices into my teaching, but these sessions helped me find a more friendly process and a learning network for support.

In Backwards Planning, I really liked the idea of using essential questions to guide your planning. I will add that to my unit plans.

I give more thought to essential questions and use them in my teaching.

Usefulness of Products and Services

The participant survey asked two open-ended questions about the most and least useful of the mRLC's products and services although there were low response rates to both questions. About 1/3 of the survey respondents completed these questions.

According to these respondents, the *most useful* programs and services were essential learning outcomes (website tools, planning documents and unit plans) and backwards planning and the new report card implementation.

A few respondents appeared to lack knowledge of the range of mRLC programs and services. One respondent to the participant survey added,

I don't know what these services are and I am not familiar enough with the mRLC programs and services to answer the question.

Another added,

I'm not sure if I've received anything else.

Responsiveness to Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning

Another function of mRLC's PD activities and capacity building is to be responsive to initiatives and curriculum developments from Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning.

Most (78%) of the respondents to the superintendent survey indicated that there appeared to be a close alignment to Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning. The remainder (22%) indicated that there was some alignment or that more alignment is needed. According to one superintendent, the mRLC needs to

> *continue to determine rural needs and where applicable match with government policy and initiatives.*

As evidenced by the following comment, the responsiveness of the mRLC to Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning was appreciated by one of the respondents to the participant survey.

> *Last year, when principals were scrambling to find PD opportunities on provincial report card, the mRLC was there to bring principals together and provide support from department.*

One of the facilitators urged the mRLC to be more deliberate in its responsiveness to the Department.

> *I mean let's go through the Department's transition documents and talk about what that means in a practical way in rural schools or whatever the topic. Universal Design for Learning of course is the top one or inclusion practices in a high school, that's another potential topic. Those are topics that we people could get their teeth into, but it's a question of how to do it.*

Networking Opportunities and Educator Capacity

Participation in learning networks

Almost half of the survey respondents indicated that they were not participating in a learning network. Out of the 50% of respondents who were part of a learning network, about one-third had met as part of a learning network 1 to 3 times. 20% of the respondents had met 4 or more times. Notably, the term *network* did not appear in any of the feedback slips.

These results should be viewed with caution as the participants may not be aware of the term learning network. For example, one of the survey respondents (a classroom teacher who had participated in more than 9 mRLC sessions) commented that he/she was unsure *of what a 'learning network' means*. Another example is the resource teachers cohort, which

the facilitator referred to as a professional learning community because, *'they aren't working on a product'*.

Even so, the establishment and sustainability of learning networks appear to be problematic for participants.

There are a lot of sessions and that means a lot of time out of the classroom since they encourage teams. This puts a strain on finding subs.

The group work has been frustrating and getting together has been difficult.

Information shared by the facilitators is useful but I am frustrated by the group work component. I am part of a four member group. We have met twice at scheduled workshops. One of our members was absent at second meeting. Another will probably be on leave by the time we have our last session. I do not feel significant information is being shared in my group. I left after second meeting feeling frustrated and I have to come up with a lesson plan and implement it by our third and final meeting. It feels more like an individual effort.

Relationship building is part of the development and sustainability of learning networks as one of the facilitators commented.

You kind of have to have a chance to get to know each other and trust each other a little bit. Meetings between meetings would be a way of doing that. But even to just get people interested in doing that, they have to feel like you know somebody well enough feel like it would be worth spending more time with in order to pursue some topic or whatever.

One superintendent commented that

Changes have been evident in those teachers who have attended the networks. However, there is not much spin off benefit to other teachers at this point.

Collaborative Inquiry Approach and Action Research

Two foundations of the mRLC's vision for learning networks are *collaborative inquiry* and *action research*.

Collaborative Inquiry Approach:

The first question on the feedback slips asks, "*How did collaborative inquiry impact your learning today? What did you learn from others? What did you contribute to others' learning?*"

Notably, there were very few references to *collaborative inquiry* in the teacher feedback slips. In contrast to this, there was a high word count frequencies for *collaborative, sharing* and *collaboration*. The exceptions to these were the multiple references to *collaborative inquiry* as well as *action research* from sessions presented by three facilitators.

Finally, a discrepancy emerges based on participant survey responses. Specifically, 90% of the respondents felt that the PD sessions and the collaborative inquiry approach aligned closely. However, this response is questionable given the low word count frequencies on the feedback slips

Two inferences can be drawn from the discrepancy between use of collaborative inquiry on the feedback slips and the participant survey. Firstly, participants consider collaboration and sharing to be synonymous with collaborative inquiry as evidenced by the following comment:

> *I found that the sessions I attended were not relevant to what I am currently doing. I would have rather just found the information in an online document that I could go through at my own time, rather than being forced to spend several days out of my classroom. If a collaborative approach is desired, set up something like drop box and/or google docs so that we can do it that way.*

Secondly, some of the facilitators appear to have a lack of understanding of the collaborative inquiry approach. This is particularly evident in the facilitators' responses to the question, *How did you use collaborative inquiry*?

Examples of facilitators' comments include:

> *We used a series of activities that required collaboration throughout both sessions from brainstorming ideas, sharing experiences and perceptions to joint unit and lesson planning.*

> *Each step of the groups' ... plan was an opportunity for them to work with their grade level colleagues, sharing their*

expertise, concerns, and ideas. We would then share these
with the larger group. Teachers were constantly engaged in
high levels of professional dialogues with their colleagues.

Both of my cohorts began with discussions about participants' needs
and then identified priorities. We focused subsequent sessions on
those priorities with participants contributing from their own
knowledge and expertise.

The culture and approach of each meeting was predicated on
collaborative inquiry. However, during the feedback/debriefing at the
conclusion of the 3rd and 4th face-to-face meeting, participants
indicated that their preference is NOT collaborative inquiry. Rather,
they would prefer specific skill-developing workshops with a
presenter.

Participants want a 'stand and deliver' type of PD session.

In contrast, one of the facilitators who has a familiarity with the
collaborative inquiry approach commented on its benefits and challenges:

For this [network] it was never my intention to bring expertise to
them. The network was meant to be professional learning community
where the onus was on the participants to identify the topic and
decide what kind of a work plan they were going to pursue in order to
use at subsequent meetings. And the problem would be that
professional learning community idea was that some people get a
better job than others are bringing information to the table.

Well, in all honesty, some of the participants really took it seriously
and brought lots of information back to the table. Some of the others
it was kind of spotty. There were some people who really brought stuff
to share but other participants didn't, you know they sort of didn't do
their homework and it was not a wonderful process.

Action Research:
In the 36 sets of more than 200 feedback slips there were only 12 word
count frequencies for *research* all of which came from leadership PD
session. Only two facilitators referred to research in their reports. In
contrast to these findings, 90% of the respondents to the participant survey
indicated that the sessions were closely aligned to action research.

As with collaborative inquiry, there appears to be direct connection between the PD facilitator and the use of action research. All of the 8 sets of feedback slips citing the term research or action research can be traced back to leadership sessions. The evaluator also noted that the participants in the leadership sessions made the connection between a collaborative inquiry approach and action research. Comments on the feedback slips from the leadership session described the impact of the session as:

- *Improved student outcomes due to action research.*
- *More of a collaborative approach with team members as well as an assessment /data gathering change.*
- *More deliberate and thoughtful action plans grounded in research.*

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The overarching question for this program evaluation was

> *To what extent has the mRLC, as a network cooperative, achieved its goal of providing collaborative, innovative support for rural educators in order to improve learning for all students with a particular focus on Aboriginal and at-risk learners?*

The *major conclusion* of this program evaluation is that the mRLC has **made significant progress** toward its goal to be a collaborative, non-governmental, non-profit organization designed to support students, teachers, principals, support services staff, superintendents, and school boards in rural Manitoba.

In the program, the evaluator found that the mRLC has consistently engaged in *collaborative processes* with superintendents, participants, facilitators, and funding partners. The superintendents were particularly pleased with the consultation and collaborative process to identify professional development needs.

Superintendents and participants greatly appreciate the mRLC's *focus on rural educators* as evidenced by the comments on the superintendent and participant surveys. There were also several comments asking that the mRLC continue its attention to meeting the unique needs of rural school divisions.

Based on the evaluation findings, the mRLC's efforts to improve the teaching practices of the participants are having an effect particularly for participants engaged in *learning networks*. This trend will continue as more learning networks become established and with increased mentoring and consultation between the PD sessions may be helpful in fully realizing the impact on teaching practice.

The evaluator found that the type and kind of *innovative support* is an area that needs attention. To date, the organization's use of technology and technology-based programs and services appeared to be limited. Innovative support also includes new approaches and models of teacher professional learning such as the collaborative inquiry approach. The program evaluator commends the mRLC for its continued commitment to learning from education research and exploring new opportunities to improve teacher professional learning.

Finally, the program evaluator found that there was little evidence to show that the mRLC's programs and services have a *particular focus on Aboriginal and at-risk learners* even though there are specific questions on the feedback slips and the facilitators' reports. Responses to questions included references to inclusive learning, differentiated instruction and learning outcomes for all students. While laudable, these efforts should not be considered as synonymous with knowing about and appreciating the learning needs of Aboriginal and at-risk learners.

A. Sub-questions
1. *To what extent do the mRLC's administrative, organizational and professional development activities contribute to building capacity?*

The program evaluator found that the mRLC is continually trying to improve its *administrative* contributions, specifically communications. As many know, the maintenance of websites and distribution of information are on-going challenges. That said, the program evaluator found that there were many examples of a lack of consistency in terminology. In the opinion of the program evaluator, the lack of consistent terminology remains problematic.

In terms of *organizational* activities, a large percentage (40%) of the participant survey respondents asked the mRLC to improve the organizations of the sessions. This was in contrast to the superintendents who were generally happy with the organization. Administrative and organizational hiccups are short-term and fixable.

One aspect of the mRLC's organizational activities is the selection of facilitators. Based on the evidence from the facilitators' reports and the word count frequencies of the feedback slips, the program evaluator found that not all of the facilitators were aligning their sessions with the mRLC's key features of networking, collaborative inquiry, action research, and Aboriginal and at-risk youth.

2. *To what extent are the networking opportunities promoted by the mRLC building capacity?*

Many of the learning networks promoted by the mRLC to build capacity of teachers are in their infancy. For example, many of the participants were new and had only attended less than three sessions. The program evaluator believes that the networks will grow over time, if there is

consistent participation in the learning network. Finally, the mRLC is clearly on the right track. As described in the Introduction section of this report, collaborative activities are key elements for the improvement of teaching practice.

In the opinion of the program evaluator, the most serious challenge of the networking opportunity (and to the mRLC overall) is that only a few of the facilitators are familiar with the concepts and processes of collaborative inquiry and action research. To illustrate, the following definition summarizes the concepts of collaborative inquiry and action research.

> *Recurring cycles of planning, action and reflection characterize the professional learning experience. Educators engage in learning and conversation from inside their practice and build on their professional knowledge by examining and reflecting on new learning through the lens of prior knowledge and experience, new information and data, and the impact of their actions.*
>
> Retrieved from http://www.literacyinlearningexchange.org/collaborative-inquiry-differs. July 11, 2014

The results of the program evaluation indicate that participants and several facilitators equate sharing and collaboration with the specific processes of collaborative inquiry.

At the risk of over-statement, the program evaluator considers this issue to be the largest challenge, and greatest threat, to the mRLC achieving its goal. One suggestion may be to use a professional development model (Appendix E) as the overarching framework for the mRLC.

Recommendations

Participants, facilitators, superintendents, and the program evaluator have provided a number of recommendations for the mRLC's consideration.

As an overarching recommendation, we recommend that
> *the mRLC continue its efforts to provide innovative and collaborative leadership for professional development services for rural school divisions and educators.*

The following recommendations follow from that overarching recommendation.

Recommendation 1: Sustain the foundations of the mRLC

Across the literature, there is clear evidence that the collaborative inquiry approach, action research and learning networks are effective strategies to improve teaching practice.

We recommend that the mRLC:
- *Continue to base its efforts on the foundations of collaborative inquiry, action research and the promotion of learning networks.*
- *Continue to provide facilitator training sessions in order to ensure the awareness and knowledge of collaborative inquiry approach, action research and learning networks.*

Recommendation 2: Enhance and monitor organizational details

It is often the little things that make a difference and for many of the participants and superintendents, there were a few organizational details that need attention and monitoring.

We recommend that the mRLC:
- *Improve timing and dissemination of information.*
- *Continue to aim for consistency in language and terminology.*
- *Establish and articulate the role and functions of learning networks. Include mechanisms in the learning networks to identify teacher learning needs.*
- *Monitor the organization of the programs and services through an Event Evaluation (Appendix D).*

Recommendation 3: Enhance focus on Aboriginal and at-risk learners

The mRLC states that it has a particular focus on Aboriginal and at-risk learners. The program evaluation findings indicate that the focus on Aboriginal and at-risk learners in professional learning sessions may not be as explicit as the mRLC intended.

Given the population in Manitoba, professional learning programs and services that help teachers address the learning needs of Aboriginal

students should be a priority of the mRLC. There are a number of Aboriginal organizations in Manitoba with a focus on cultural awareness and FNMI pedagogy that the mRLC could turn to for assistance in developing professional learning programs and services.

We recommend that the mRLC

- *Explicitly establish the learning needs of Aboriginal and at-risk youth as a priority of the mRLC.*
- *Develop professional development programs and sessions that will help teachers address the learning needs of Aboriginal students, at-risk youth and other defined populations such as immigrant students.*
- *Establish working relationships with Aboriginal organizations, indigenous scholars, Elders, immigration or youth-at-risk services.*

Recommendation 4: Identify or develop measurements of effectiveness

As outlined in the Introduction section of this report, one of the biggest challenges of determining the effectiveness of teacher professional learning is making the direct connection to improved student achievement.

The same challenge emerged in this program evaluation. Specifically, in spite of the large body of data (participant and superintendent surveys, facilitators' reports, feedback slips, and interviews) the program evaluator was not able to accurately capture and describe the link between the mRLC's professional development services and student achievement.

That said, there was strong evidence from the program evaluation data that the mRLC is achieving its goal of providing collaborative, innovative support for rural educators in order to improve learning for all students with a particular focus on Aboriginal and at-risk learners.

Also indicated in the Introduction to this report, the program evaluator could not find an overarching set of measurements that link teacher professional learning directly with student achievement. Some content- or subject-area measures do exist but they are reliant on well-planned and rigorous (and well-funded) research activities. A note of caution: these content- or subject-area measures should be reviewed with a critical eye. The program evaluator found several examples of research reports claiming to link professional development and student achievement in a specific subject that were weak or misleading.

Finally, after reviewing more than 1300 studies on teacher professional learning and student achievement, Yoon et al. (2007) advised researchers (or professional learning service providers) to measure the direct effect on teachers of professional development activities.

We recommend that the mRLC

- *Research and identify measurements to demonstrate the direct effect of professional learning on teachers. These measurements should be specific to the content-area of the professional development sessions.*
- *Research and identify measurements that will help sustain and enhance the collaborative inquiry process and learning networks.*
- *Consider using the Continual Professional Development Model (Appendix E) as an organizing framework for measuring the impact of the professional development sessions. This framework could also be used to promote the active involvement of participants to identify learning needs and monitor the impact of their participation in learning networks.*

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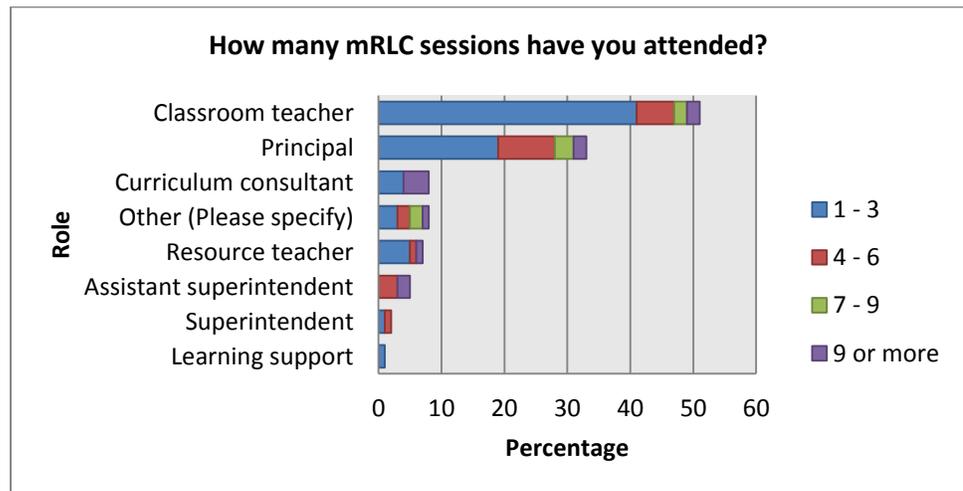
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Appendix A: Participant Survey Results

Respondents by Role

At just over 52%, classroom teachers represented the majority of the participants who had attended 1 to 3 sessions. Principals represented the majority of those who had attended 4 to 6 sessions. (Survey questions 1 and 3)
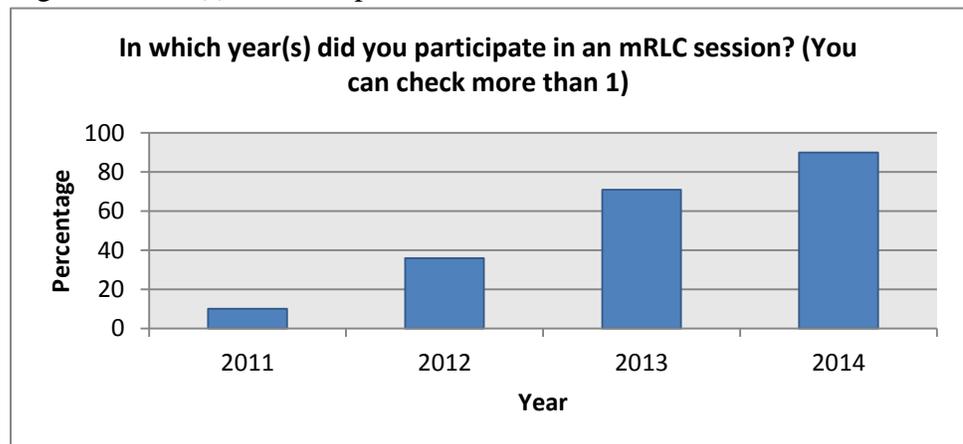
Figure 1. Attendance by Respondents' Roles in Their School Division

How many mRLC sessions have you attended?

Role (y-axis): Classroom teacher, Principal, Curriculum consultant, Other (Please specify), Resource teacher, Assistant superintendent, Superintendent, Learning support

Legend: 1 - 3, 4 - 6, 7 - 9, 9 or more

X-axis: Percentage (0 to 60)

Participation by Year

Participants were asked to indicate which year or years they had participated in mRLC sessions. Less than 10% of the respondents (N=100 indicated that they had participated in sessions in 2011. Clearly most of the participation was in 2013 and 2014. (Survey question 2)

Figure 2. Year(s) of Participation in mRLC Sessions

In which year(s) did you participate in an mRLC session? (You can check more than 1)

X-axis: Year (2011, 2012, 2013, 2014)
Y-axis: Percentage (0 to 100)

Respondents by Experience

A large majority (92%) of the overall attendees were experienced teachers (more than 5 years in the profession). None of the respondents indicated that they were beginning teachers. (Survey question 4)

Reasons for Participation

More than half (59%) of the respondents indicated that their school division or principal had asked them to attend the mRLC sessions. 41% indicated that it was a personal choice to participate in the sessions. (Survey question 5)

Figure 3. Learning Networks Attended by Respondents (Survey question 6)
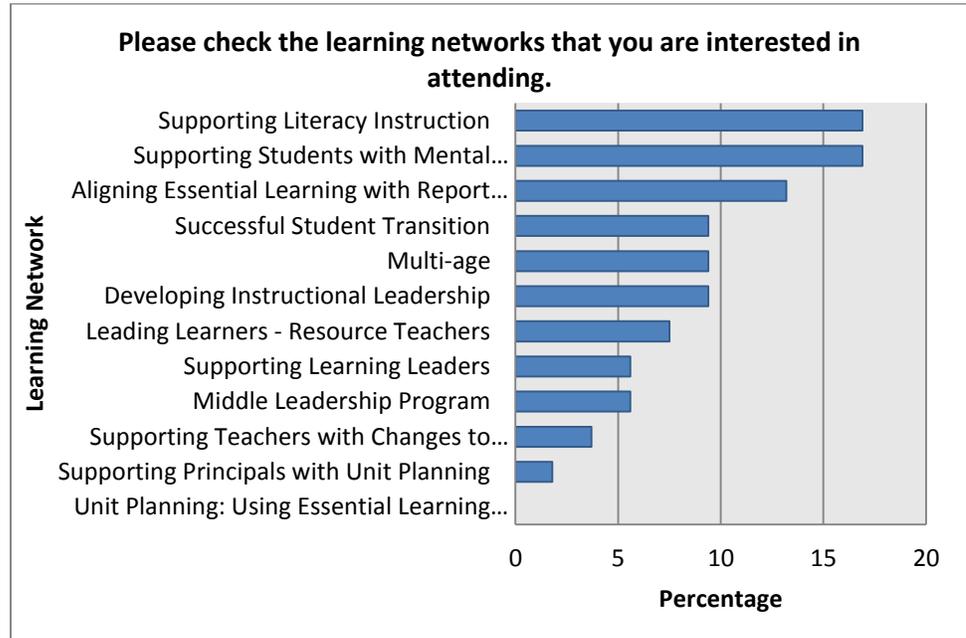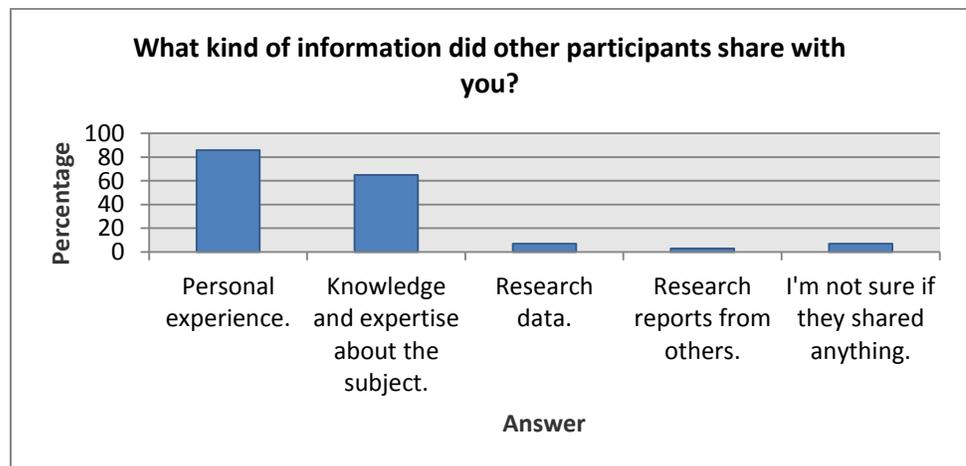
Please check the learning networks that you have attended.

Learning Network (y-axis), Percentage (x-axis, 0 to 60)

- Unit Planning: Using Essential… — ~48
- Aligning Essential Learning with… — ~14
- Supporting Principals with Unit… — ~9
- Developing Instructional Leadership — ~8
- Supporting Teachers with Changes to… — ~4
- Successful Student Transition — ~3
- Supporting Literacy Instruction — ~3
- Middle Leadership Program — ~3
- Supporting Learning Leaders — ~2
- Multi-age — ~2
- Supporting Students with Mental… — ~1
- Leading Learners - Resource Teachers — ~1

Figure 4. Learning Networks Respondents Are Interested in Attending (Survey question 6)

Please check the learning networks that you are interested in attending.

Learning Network:
- Supporting Literacy Instruction
- Supporting Students with Mental...
- Aligning Essential Learning with Report...
- Successful Student Transition
- Multi-age
- Developing Instructional Leadership
- Leading Learners - Resource Teachers
- Supporting Learning Leaders
- Middle Leadership Program
- Supporting Teachers with Changes to...
- Supporting Principals with Unit Planning
- Unit Planning: Using Essential Learning...

Percentage (0, 5, 10, 15, 20)

Kind and Quality of Participants' Information

About 90% of the respondents indicated that the participants mostly shared their personal experience and knowledge. Approximately 12% of the respondents rated the information they shared with others as high quality information and 84% as good information or moderately useful information. (Survey questions 7 and 8)

Figure 5. Type of Information Shared by Other Participants (Survey question 9)

What kind of information did other participants share with you?

Percentage (0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100)

Answer:
- Personal experience.
- Knowledge and expertise about the subject.
- Research data.
- Research reports from others.
- I'm not sure if they shared anything.

Notably, just over 15% indicated that the information shared by other participants was high quality information and 85% of the respondents indicated that the quality of the information was good or only moderately useful. (Survey question 10)

Kind and Quality of Facilitators' Information

In contrast to the kind of information shared by the participants, the facilitators shared a variety of different kinds of information with the participants. (Survey question 11)

Figure 6. Type of Information Shared by the Facilitators

What kind of information did the facilitators share with you?
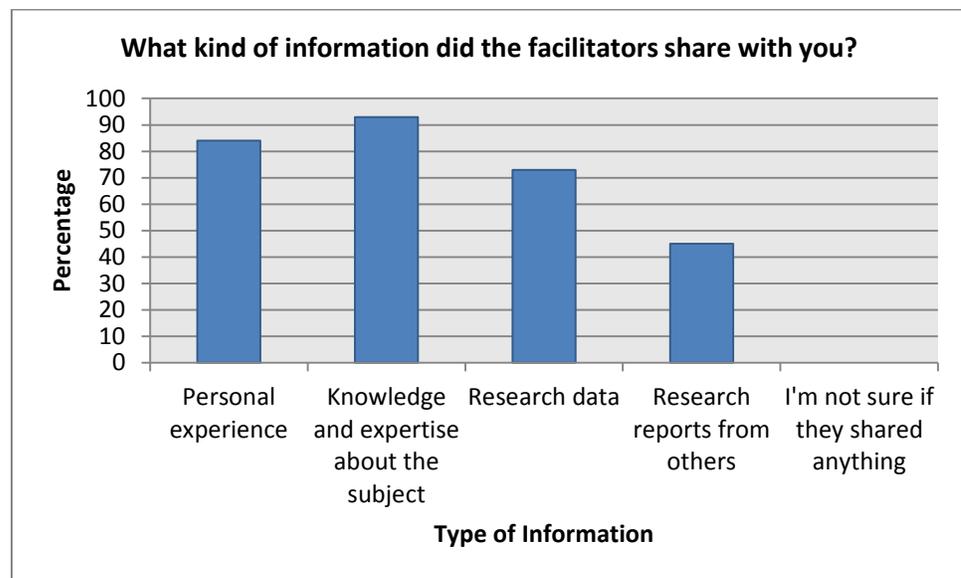
In contrast to the quality of information provided by the participants, more than 88% of the respondents indicated that the quality of the information shared by the facilitators was either good or high quality. (Survey question 12)

Mentoring

88% of the respondents reported that they have not participated in any mentoring sessions between network meetings. (Survey question 13)

Participation in Learning Network

Almost half (49%) of the overall respondents reported that they have not met with their Learning Network or Networks yet. Furthermore, the

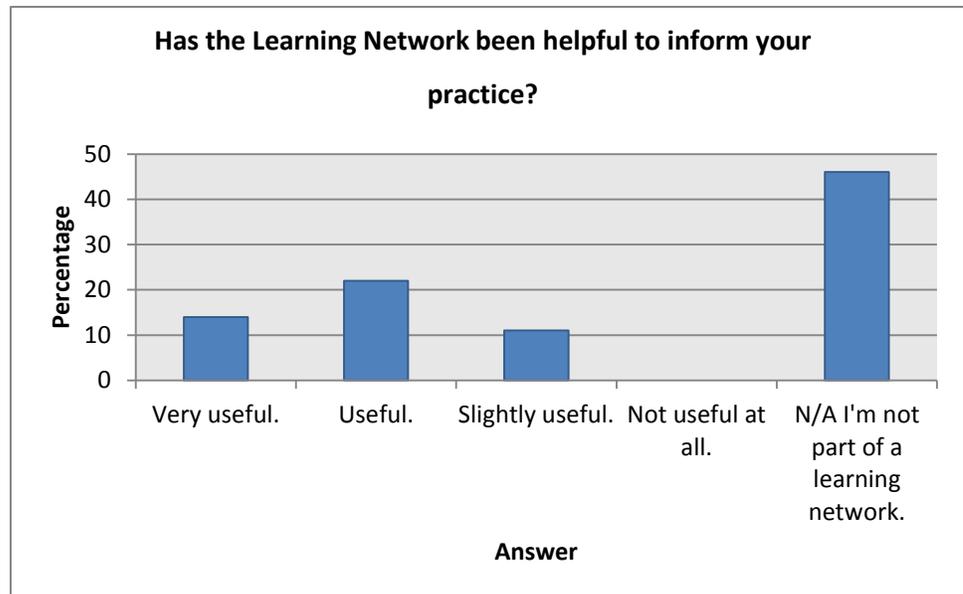majority of those that had met with their Learning Network or Networks only met 1-3 times. (Survey question 14)

Figure 7. Number of Times Participated in Learning Networks

Since September 2011, how many times have you met as a member of a Learning Network(s)?

- 1-3
- 4-6
- 7-9
- 10-12
- More than 12
- We have not met yet

33%
47%
13%
5%
2%
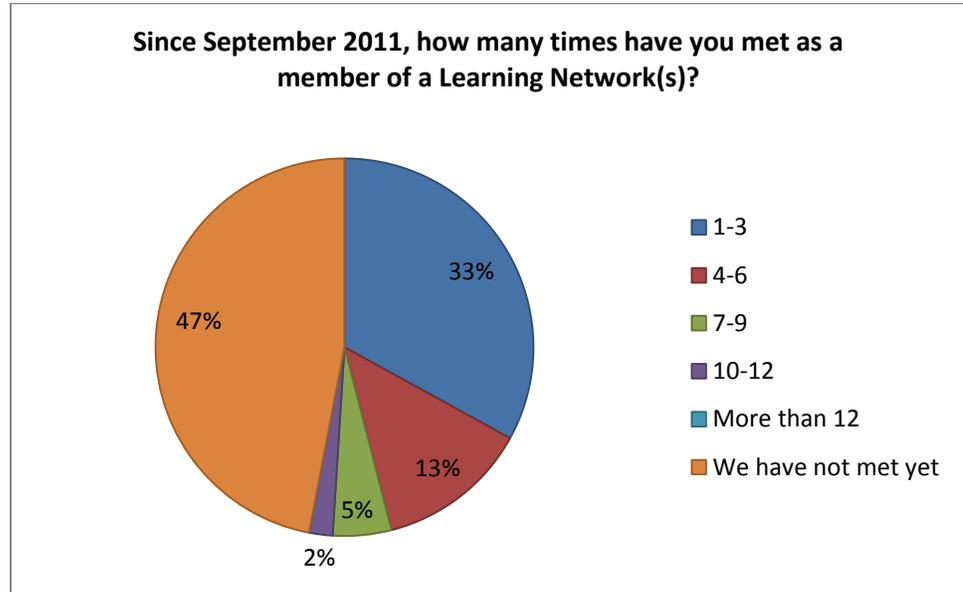
Impact of Learning Network on Practice

The results of this question are inconclusive due to the high percentage of respondents who are not part of a learning network. (Survey question 15)

Figure 8. Evaluation of the Usefulness of Learning Networks

Has the Learning Network been helpful to inform your practice?

Percentage (y-axis: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50)

Answer (x-axis: Very useful. | Useful. | Slightly useful. | Not useful at all. | N/A I'm not part of a learning network.)

Impact of Learning Network on Professional Learning

The results of this question are inconclusive due to the high percentage of respondents who are not part of a learning network. (Survey question 16)

Figure 9. Impact of Learning Networks on Professional Learning

To what extent has the Learning Network supported your professional learning?

- Very significant support.
- Moderate support.
- Too early to tell.
- Very little support.
- No support.

16%, 25%, 19%, 4%, 36%
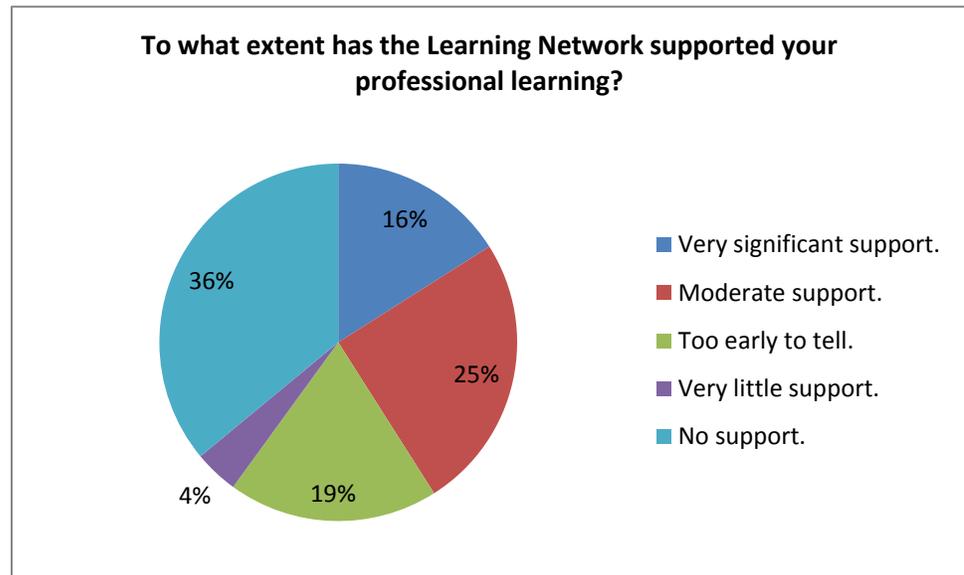
Impact of Learning Network on Teaching Practice

About one-third (32%) of the respondents indicated that there had been moderate to extensive change to their teaching practice. Two-thirds (66%) indicated that there was small to no change in their teaching practice. (Survey question 17)

Types of mRLC Services Used

In person workshops were the most used mRLC service. The participants also found the in person workshops as being the most effective of all the services provided by the mRLC. (Survey question 18)

Figure 10. Types of mRLC Services Used by Respondents

Which of the following types of mRLC services have you used? (You can pick more than 1)
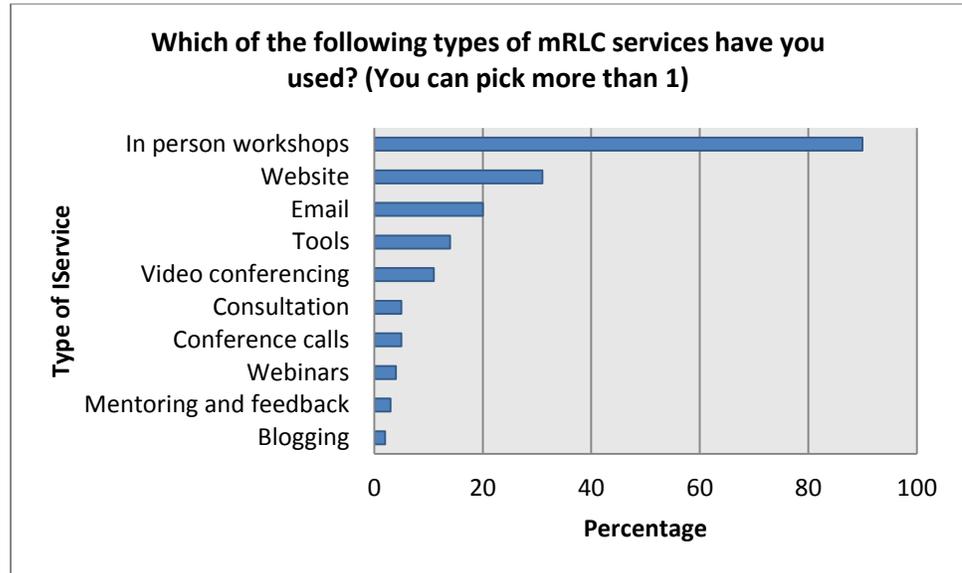
Effectiveness of the Programs and Services

More than 90% of the respondents had used in person workshops and 85% indicated that the in person workshops were either highly effective or effective. Other results are presented in order of use. (Survey question 19)

Table 1: Use and Effectiveness of mRLC's Programs and Services

Program, service and percentage of use	Effectiveness
In person workshops (95% use)	85% of respondents indicated very effective or effective
Website (30% use)	81% of respondents indicated very effective or effective
Email correspondence (20% use)	58% of respondents indicated very effective or effective; 38% indicated somewhat effective
Tools (17% use)	76% of respondents indicated that the mRLC's tools were very effective or effective
Video conferencing (15% use)	41% indicated that video conferencing was highly effective
Consultations, conference calls, webinars, mentoring and feedback, blogging	Less than 10% usage. Results inconclusive on effectiveness.

The quality and kind of information provided by and shared with participants and the facilitators are key elements of the collaborative inquiry model and action research approach.

Over 90% of the participants indicated that the mRLC programs and sessions were closely or somewhat aligned to collaborative inquiry and action research. (Survey questions 20 and 21)

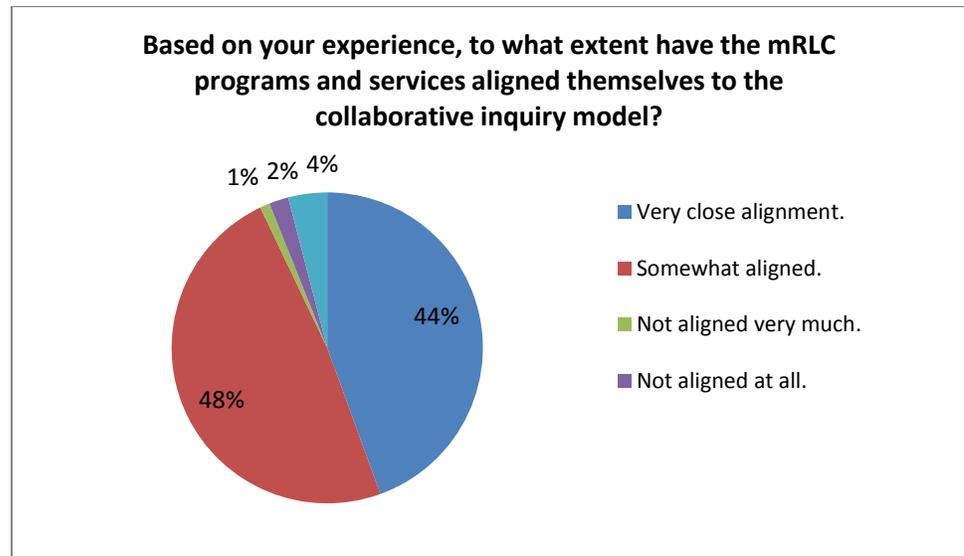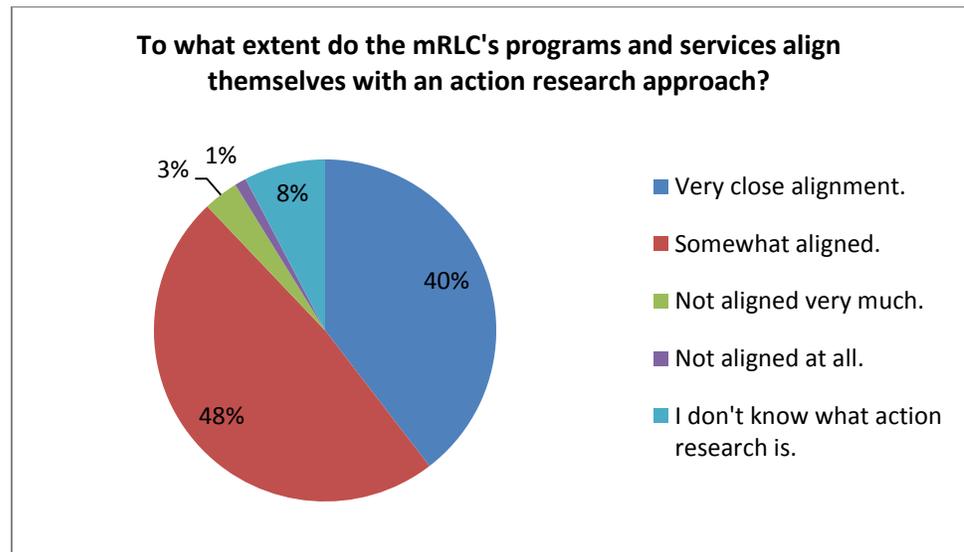Figure 11. Alignment of mRLC Programs with Collaborative Inquiry Model

Figure 12. Alignment of mRLC Programs with Action Research Model

Over half (57%) of the overall attendees reported that the mRLC is somewhat meeting the needs of rural educators. 37% strongly agreed that the mRLC is meeting the needs of rural educators. (Survey question 22)

Figure 13. Respondents' View of mRLC Meeting the Needs of Rural Educators
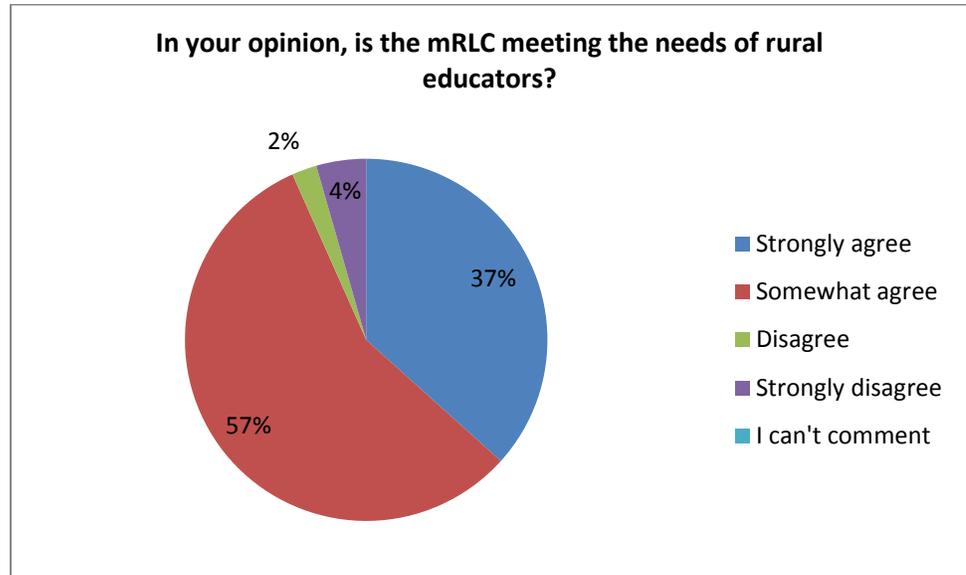
Comparison to Other PD experiences

Half of the attendees reported that they did not see much difference between the mRLC professional development sessions and other PD experiences. 35% preferred the mRLC professional development sessions. (Survey question 23)

Figure 14. Comparison of mRLC with Other Professional Development Opportunities

How would you compare your other PD experiences with the mRLC professional development sessions?

- No opinion, I have not attended any other types of PD opportunities. — 2%
- I don't see much difference. — 51%
- Other PD opportunities were better. — 12%
- 35%
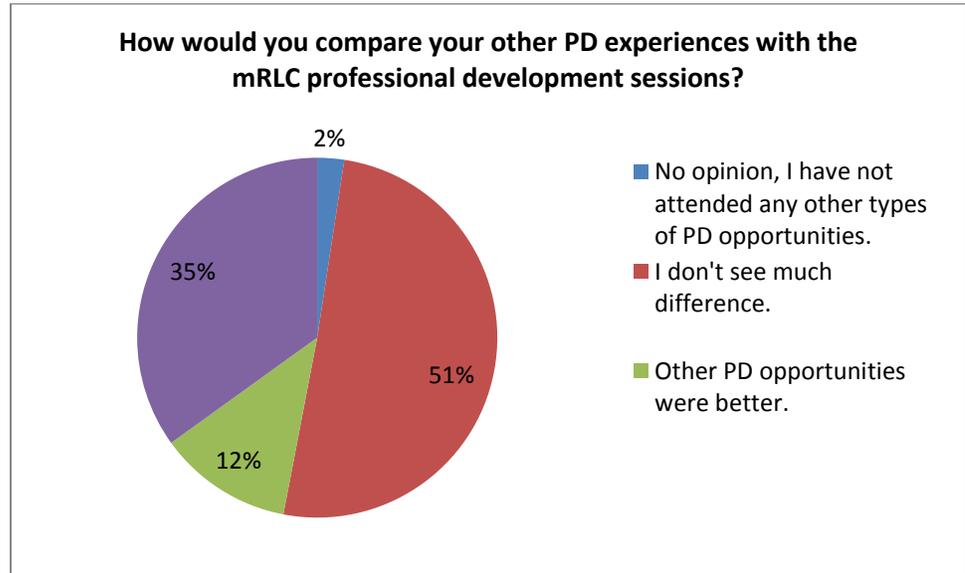
Recommendations for Improvements to mRLC Services

Improve organization of sessions, better communication and finding a more suitable location were the top three suggestions on how to improve mRLC services. (Survey question 24)

Figure 15. Suggestions for Improving mRLC Services

How can mRLC improve its services?

Suggestion (y-axis), Percentage (x-axis, 0 to 50)

- Improve organization of sessions — ~42
- Other — ~39
- Find a more suitable location — ~37
- Better communication — ~31
- Better timing of information — ~27
- Improve website — ~14
- Improve usability of tools — ~13
- Change facilitators — ~7
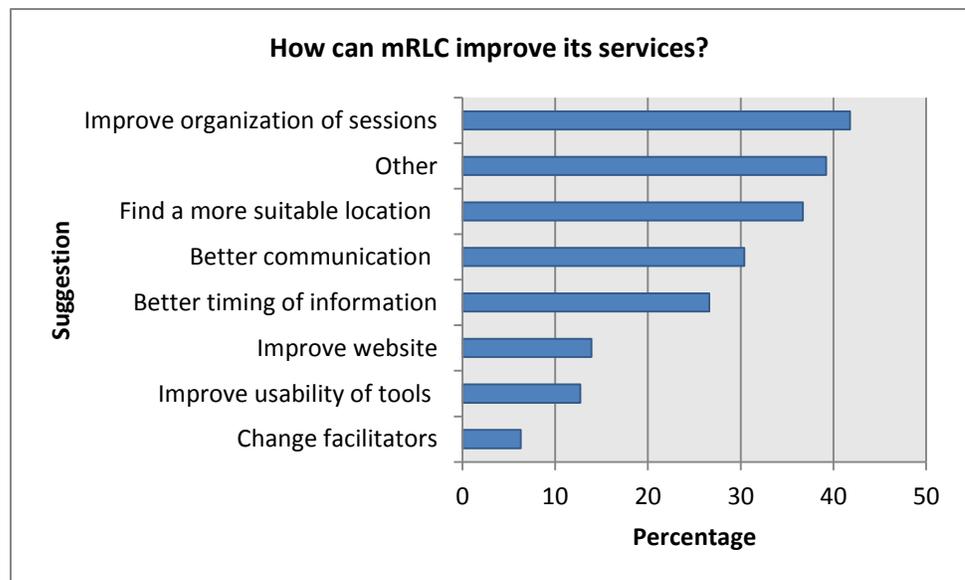
Majority of the respondents found the information provided by the mRLC as very timely or ok. (Survey question 25)

Figure 16. Evaluation of the Information provided by the mRLC

How timely is the information you receive from the mRLC?

- Very timely — 40%
- Ok — 47%
- Not very timely — 13%
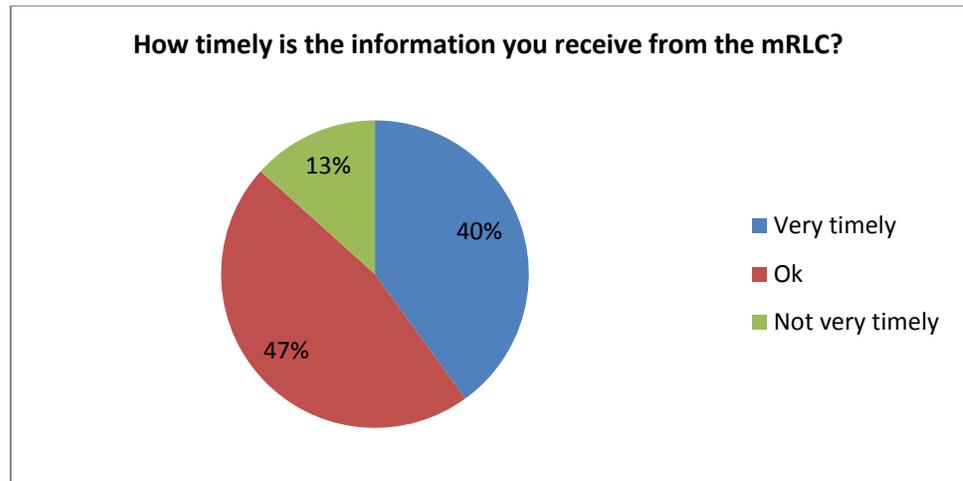
According to the respondents, the *most useful* programs and services were

1. the on-line tools particularly the grade specific outcomes
2. essential learning
3. backwards planning sessions
4. report card information

Interest in Proposed Programs and Services for 2014-2015

Respondents indicated that supporting quality learning and teaching in literacy and supporting quality learning and teaching in numeracy are the most important mRLC program or service for 2014-2015 (Survey question 28).

Figures 17-26 illustrate the respondents' interest in the proposed mRLC programs and services for 2014-2015.

Figure 17. Supporting Quality Learning and Teaching in Literacy

Literacy
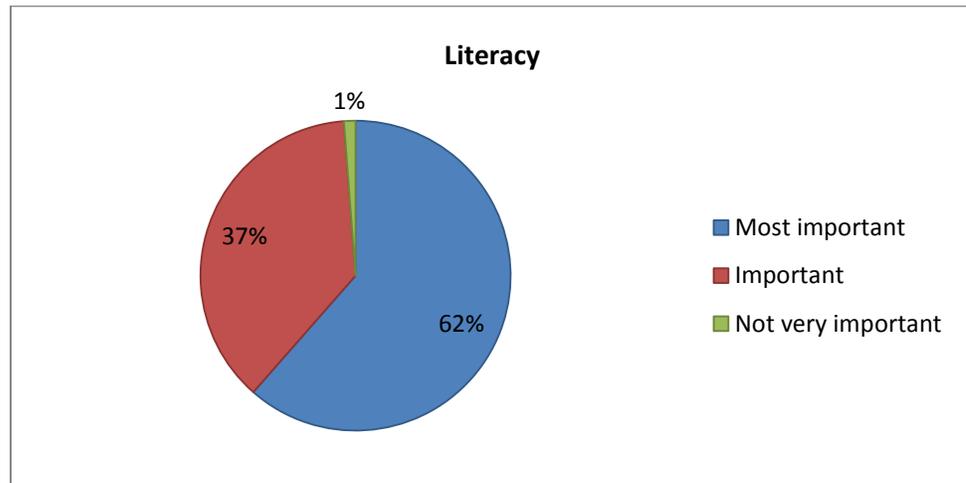
Figure 18. Supporting Quality Learning and Teaching in Numeracy

Numeracy
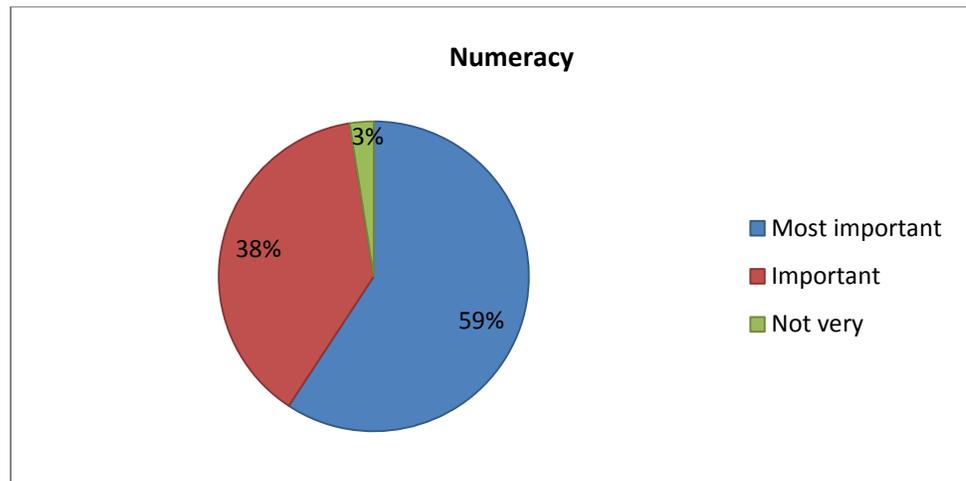
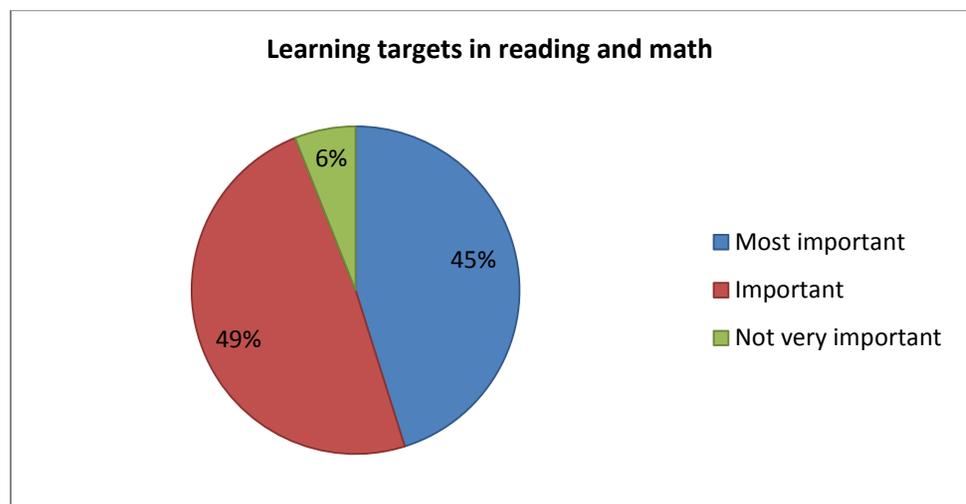

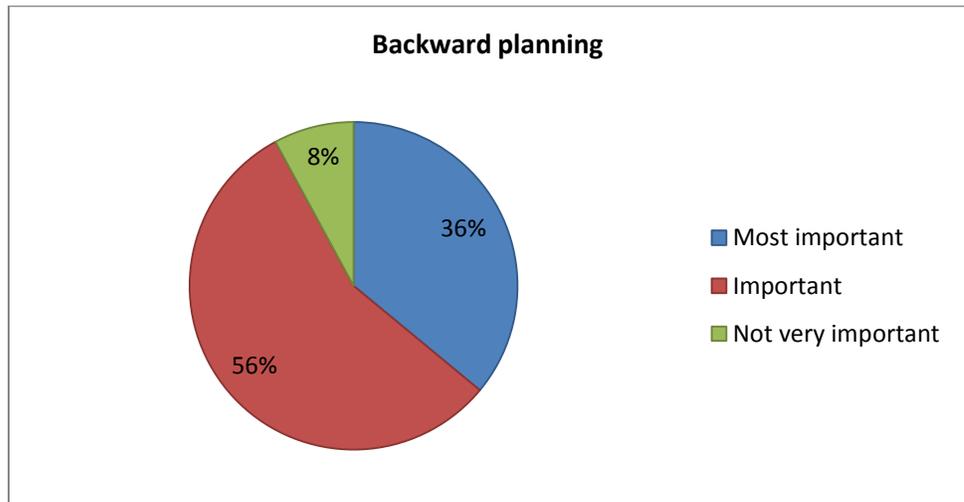Figure 19. Defining Learning Targets in Reading and Math

Learning targets in reading and math

Figure 20. Backward Planning

Backward planning

- Most important 36%
- Important 56%
- Not very important 8%

Figure 21. Developing Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership

- Most important 28%
- Important 60%
- Not very important 12%
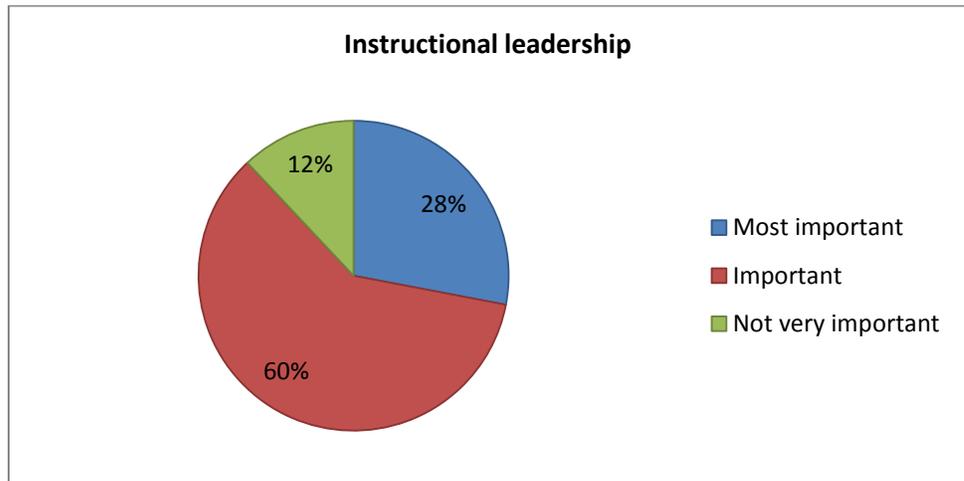
Figure 22. Supporting Students with Mental Health Issues

Students with mental health issues

- Most important 28%
- Important 58%
- Not very important 14%
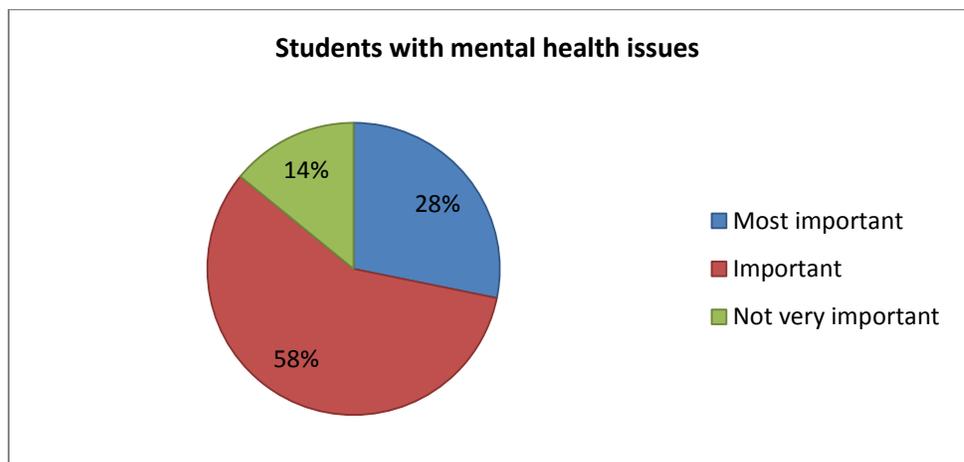
Figure 23. Multi-Age Classrooms

Multi-age classrooms

- Most important — 24%
- Important — 53%
- Not very important — 23%
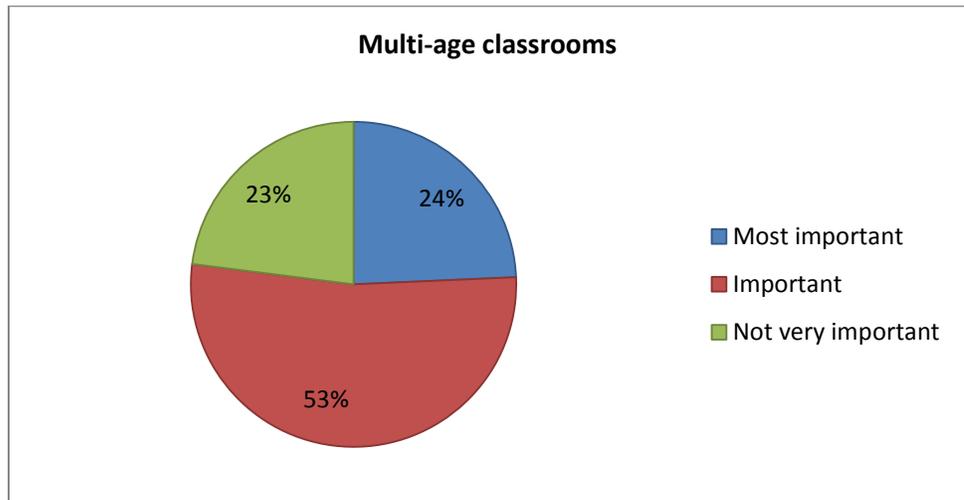
Figure 24. Supporting Resource Teacher Networks

Resource teacher networks

- Most important — 14%
- Important — 58%
- Not very important — 28%
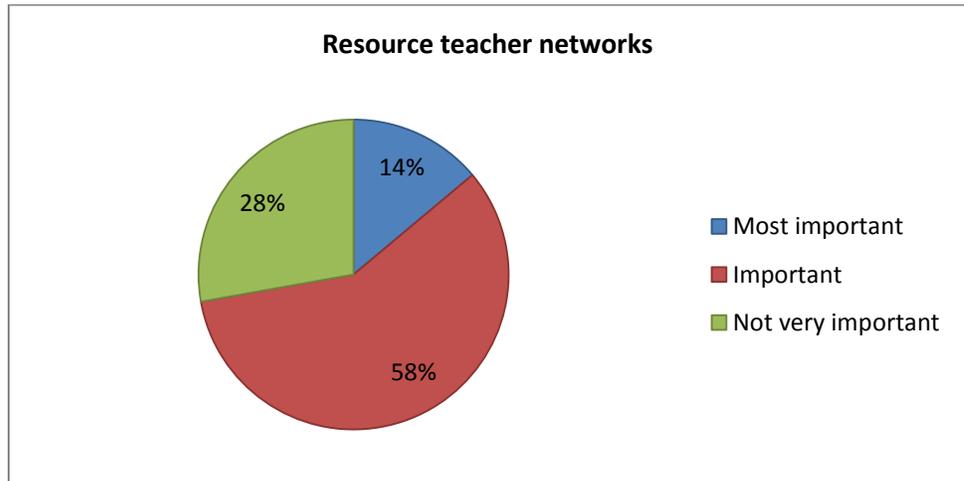
Figure 25. Middle Leadership

Middle leadership

- Most important — 8%
- Important — 64%
- Not very — 28%
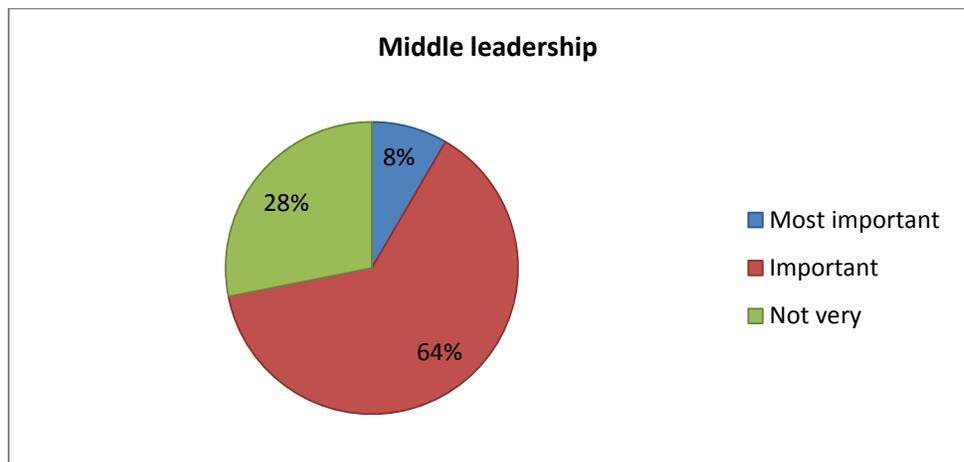
Figure 26. School Self-Review Processes

Self-review processes

- Most important
- Important
- Not very important

8%

32%

60%
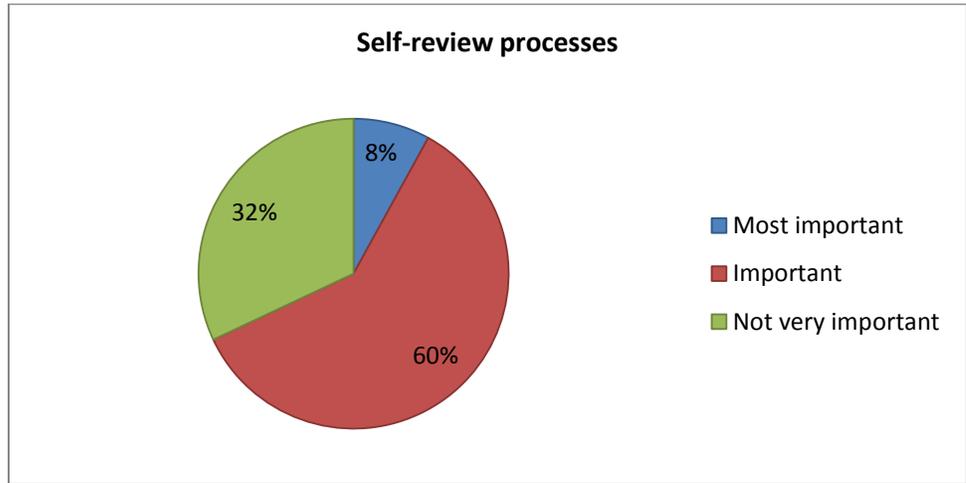
Appendix B: Superintendent Survey Results

A short survey was emailed to the 25 rural school division superintendents who are partners in the mRLC. Fourteen superintendents (56%) responded to the survey.

History with the mRLC

Most (72%) of the superintendents who responded to the survey had been involved with the mRLC for 3 years. 3 school divisions had been involved for the past two years and 1 for the last year. (Survey question 1)

School Division Staff Using mRLC Programs and Services

In order of use, classroom teachers (71%), resource teachers (50%) and principals (50%) were the primary users of the mRLC. Lowest percentages of use were attributed to assistant superintendents (7%), learning support (14%), superintendents (21%), and curriculum consultants (29%). (Survey questions 2 and 3)

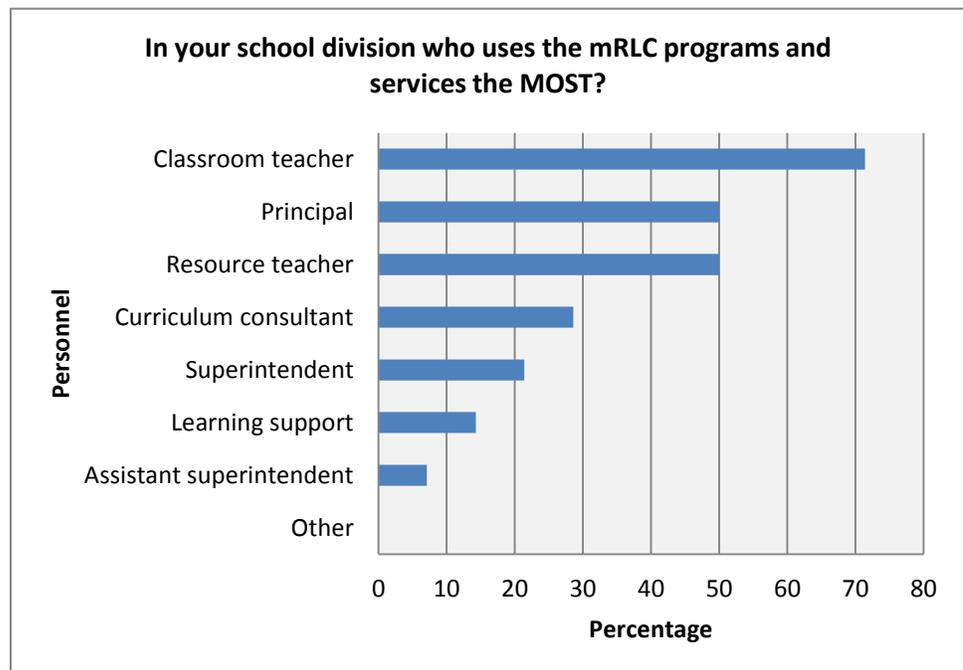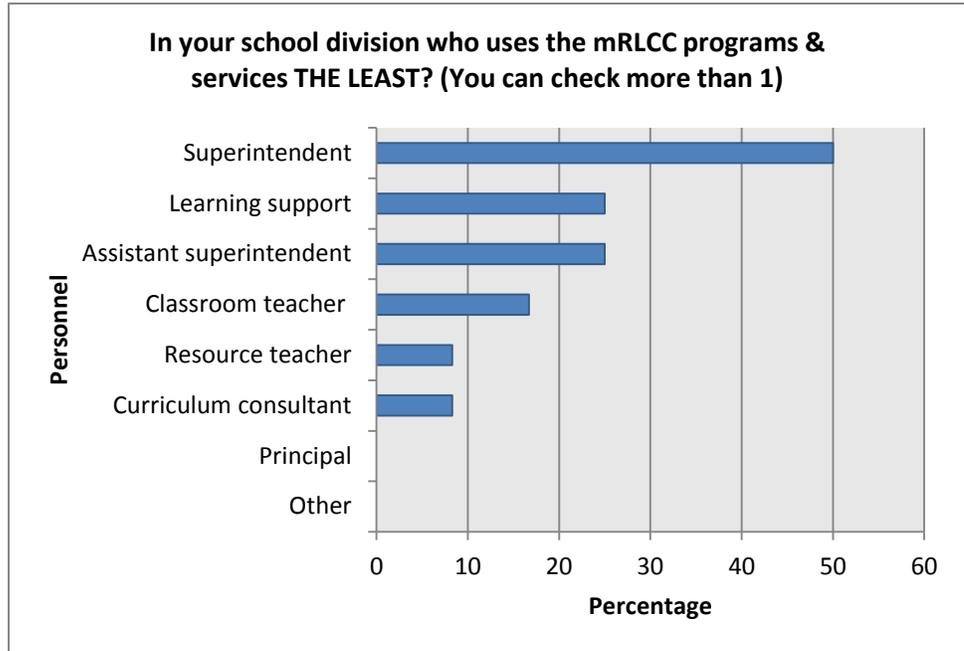Figure 27. People Using the mRLC Services the Most

Figure 28. People Using the mRLC Services the Least

In your school division who uses the mRLCC programs & services THE LEAST? (You can check more than 1)

Majority (71%) of the respondents thought that all teachers (beginning, new, and experienced) benefit from the mRLC programs and services. Almost one third (29%) of the superintendents thought that experienced teachers would benefit from these services the most. (Survey question 4)

Factors Influencing Division's Decision to Join the mRLC?

13 people responded to these questions. Figures 40-45 illustrate the factors that influenced school divisions' decision to participate in the professional development programs provided by mRLC (Survey question 5):
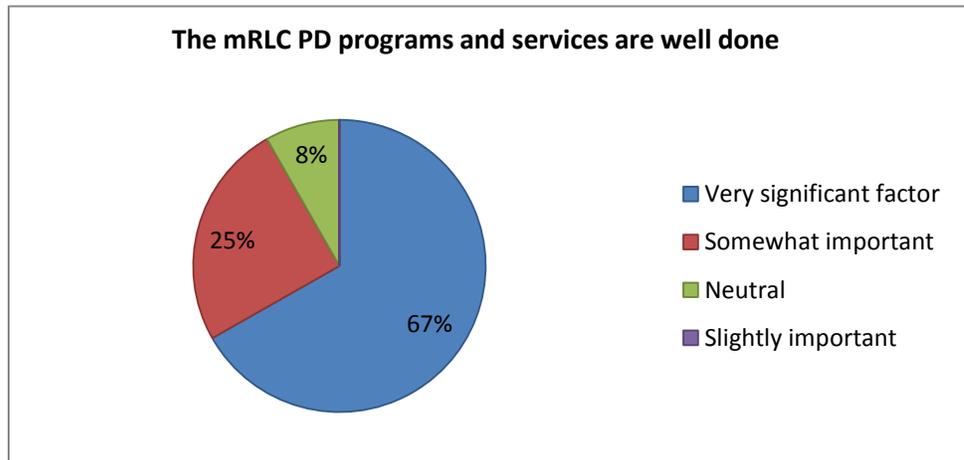
Figure 29. Quality Programs and Services

The mRLC PD programs and services are well done

8%
25%
67%

- Very significant factor
- Somewhat important
- Neutral
- Slightly important

Figure 30. Alignment with Manitoba Education

The mRLC aligns itself with Manitoba Education

- Very significant factor — 58%
- Somewhat important — 17%
- Neutral — 8%
- Slightly important — 17%
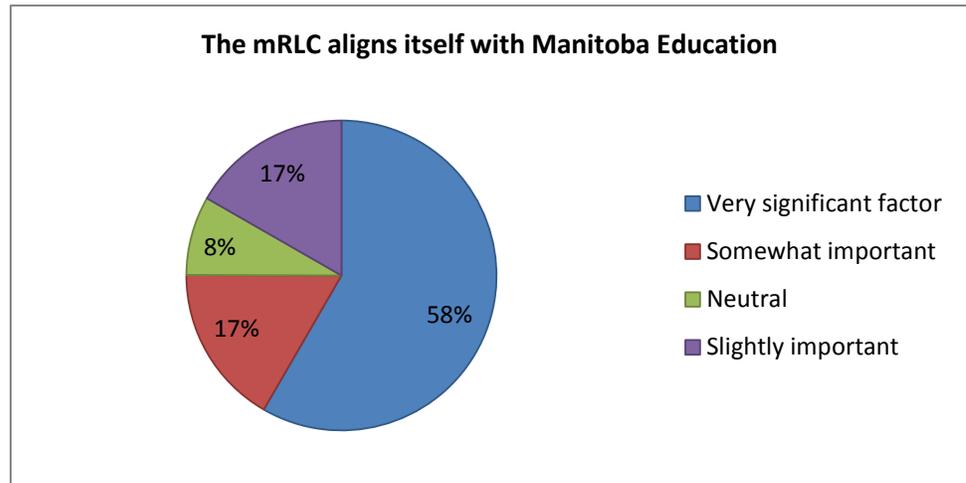
Figure 31. Focus on Rural Education

The focus is on rural education

- Very significant factor — 33%
- Somewhat important — 42%
- Neutral — 17%
- Slightly important — 8%
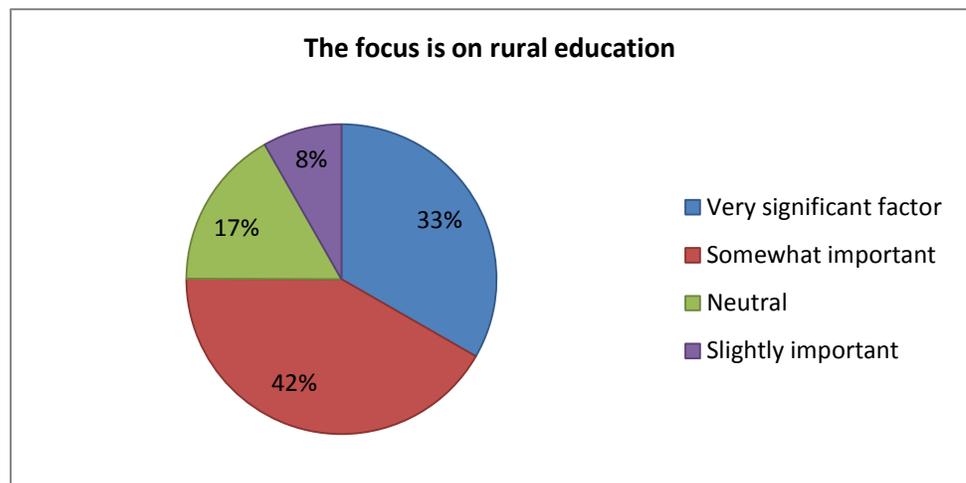
Figure 32. Cost-Effectiveness

The mRLC is cost-effective

- Very significant factor — 31%
- Somewhat important — 31%
- Neutral — 23%
- Slightly important — 7%
- Not important — 8%
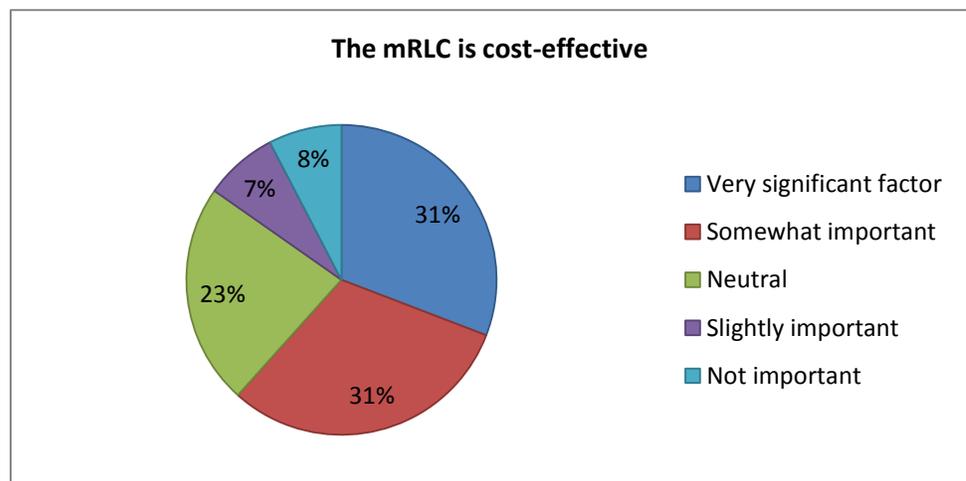
Figure 33. Limited Resources for Professional Development

We have limited resources for professional development

- Very significant factor
- Somewhat important
- Neutral
- Slightly important

9% 9% 36% 46%
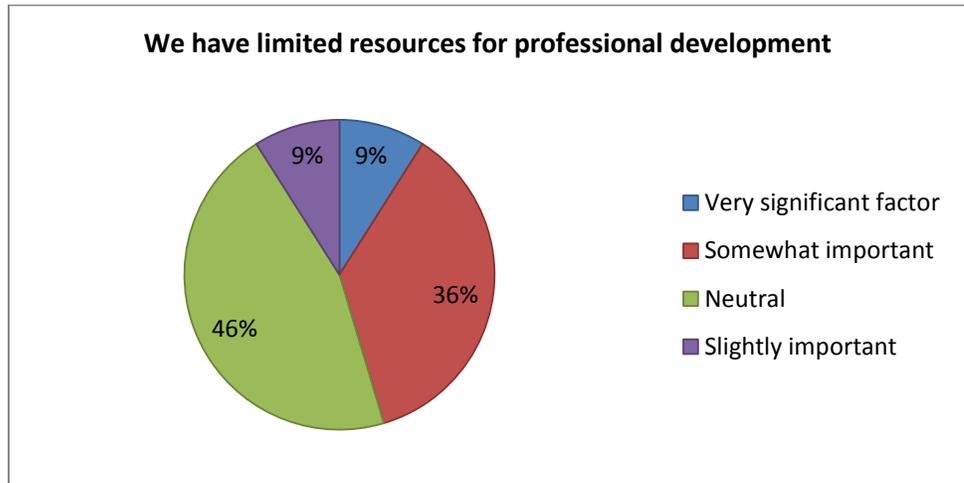
Best Type of Programs and Services

Figure 34. Types of mRLC Services Evaluated as Most Helpful (Survey question 6)

Which of the following types of mRLC programs and services work the best for your school division?
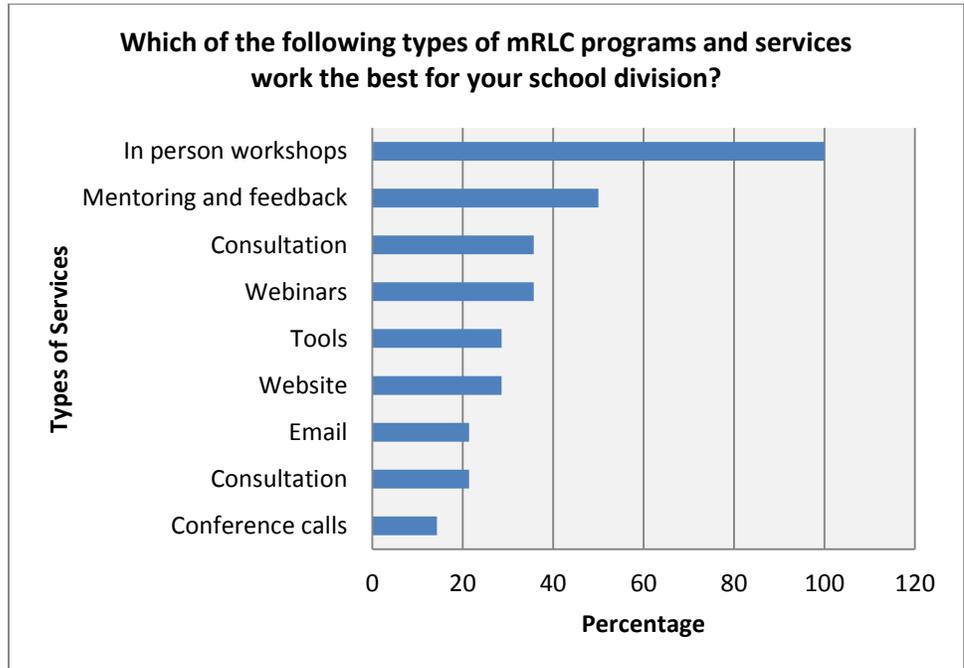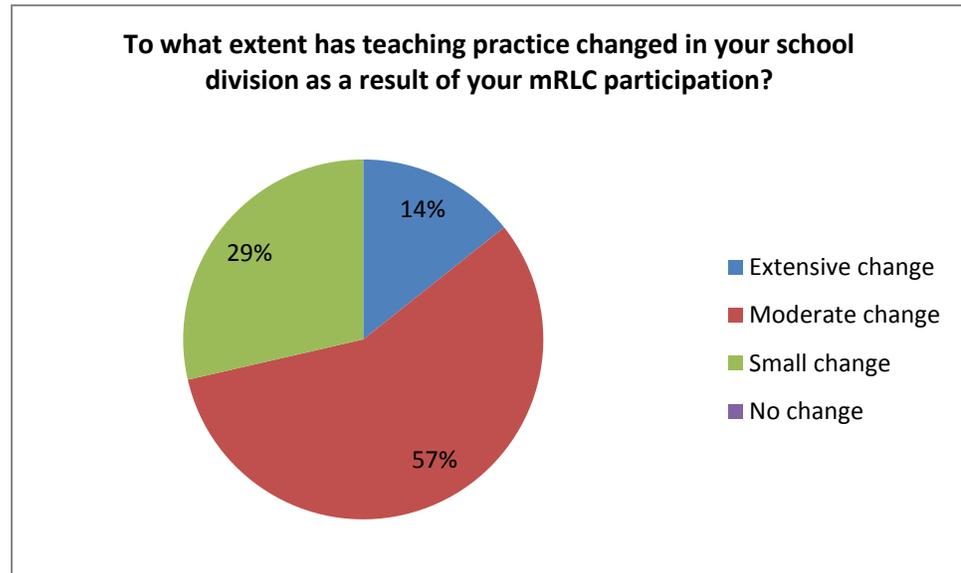
Meeting the Needs of Rural Educators

All of the superintendents (100% of the respondents) indicated that they strongly or somewhat agreed that the mRLC was meeting the needs of rural educators. (Survey question 7)

Figure 35 illustrates the superintendents' view of the impact mRLC participation has had on the teaching practice in their division. (Survey question 8)

Figure 35. Superintendents' Evaluation of the Impact of mRLC Participation on Teaching Practice

To what extent has teaching practice changed in your school division as a result of your mRLC participation?

- Extensive change
- Moderate change
- Small change
- No change

14%
29%
57%

Alignment to Manitoba Education Initiatives

Nearly all (13 out of 14) of the superintendents felt that the mRLC's efforts were closely aligned or somewhat aligned with Manitoba Education's initiatives. One superintendent felt that more alignment was needed. (Survey question 9)

Figure 36. Suggestions for Improving mRLC Services (Survey question 10)

How can the mRLC improve its services?
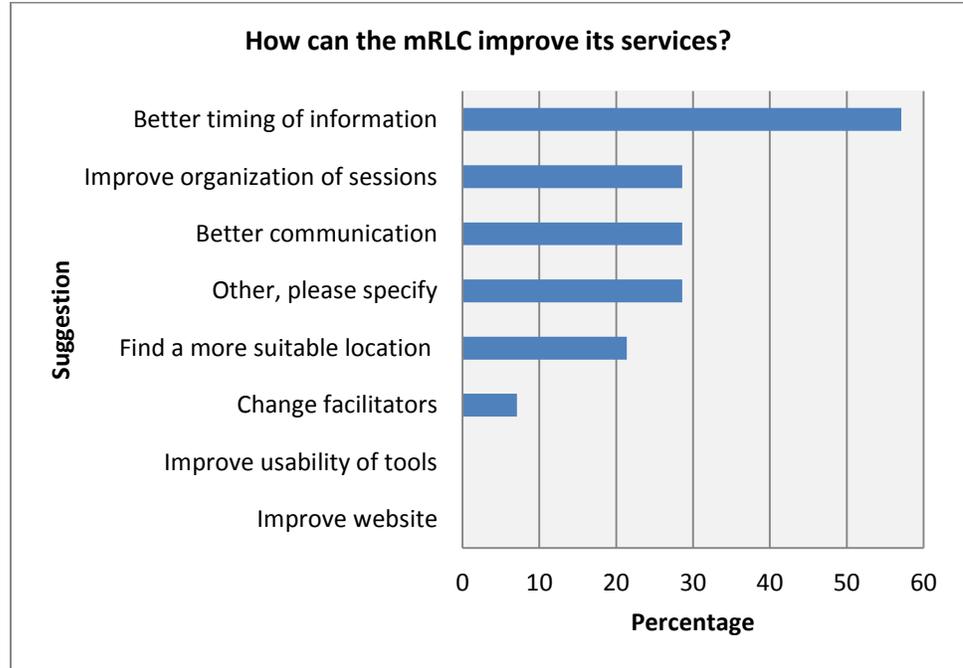
Appendix C: Word Frequency and Thematic Analysis of Feedback Slips

1. **How did collaborative inquiry impact your learning today? What did you learn from others? What did you contribute to others' learning? Explain.**

   The word frequency analysis did not show any references to the term *collaborative inquiry.* The word count showed that participants used the terms *collaboration, discussions, questions*, and *sharing* with the *colleagues*.

   A thematic analysis of this question revealed:

   - An appreciation for the collaboration with teachers, schools, and divisions (e.g., sharing ideas, working through issues, and learning from others)
   - Better understanding of strategies with plans to implement
   - Knowledge building/taking new perspectives
   - Improvements on how to help students (transitions)

2. **Will you apply aspects learned from this session in your role? Explain.**

   The two most common words were *ideas* and *planning* suggesting that respondents would apply their learning especially in preparation for their courses and classes. Other most common words were *assessment, backwards design,* and *classroom* suggesting the areas and strategies that would be most affected by the participants' learning.

   A thematic analysis of this question revealed:

   - Plans to implement backward planning
   - Strategies to use (e.g., 7 habits)
   - Sharing ideas/information (collaboration)
   - Parental/administrative/community involvement is important
   - Supporting students is important

3. **What capacity if any, was developed today? How might you use what you learned today? (e.g., you as an individual? The group? Within your division? Across divisions?). Explain.**

The word frequency analysis of the feedback slips found that *understanding* was the most common word. This suggests that this was the area which was developed the most. Other common words were *ideas, learning, planning, process, share, staff, team*, and *together* suggesting that the respondents would be sharing their learning within/across their division.

The thematic analysis indicated that participants learned the following:

- Share what they learned with colleagues, students, divisions, leadership
- Identify more clear goals made (end results)
- Better understanding of backward planning (a change in thinking)
- Support for teachers/students
- Implementation planning (changing strategies)
- Divisional/leadership involvement

4. **What outcomes resulted or will result from this mRLC service?**

Based on the word frequency analysis, participants found that their *understanding* had improved the most. They would apply their own learning in *planning, curriculum design, teaching*, and *assessment* and *share* their knowledge with other staff.

The thematic analysis revealed that participants anticipated the following outcomes:

- Teaching at individual levels
- Teach more interactively to engage learning
- Strategy changes to benefit students (teaching ways)
- Outcome instruction (looking at end goals)

5. **Specifically how is what you learned today going to improve learning for your students, in particular Aboriginal and at-risk youth?**

One of the words most commonly used was *engagement* suggesting that this is the area the participants will be focusing on. The word most frequently used in the feedback was *students*. This may suggest a more student-centered approach to teaching.

There were not a large number of responses to this question. Comments included

- Different mind sets (diversity of students)
- Teachers and those that work with at-risk students need support
- Relationship importance
- Promote resilience/motivation in Aboriginal students and at-risk students

6. Recommendations /Comments

The word most frequently used in the feedback was *continue* suggesting that the participants would like to participate in mRLC training in the future as well. Other frequently used words were *excellent, helpful, practical, examples, ideas,* and *information* suggesting that the participants found the sessions beneficial and relevant.

Although the participants perceived *lunch* as healthy, they also thought that it was too expensive. Another area that received recommendations for improvements was the *location*: Some participants wished for a more rural location for the mRLC sessions to take place in.

7. Other

The most commonly used word was *excellent* suggesting that the participants were very pleased with the mRLC service. Individual facilitators were named (Andrea, Ruth, Jennifer, and Karen) suggesting that the participants were especially pleased with these instructors. Other commonly used words were *enthusiasm, inspiring, relevant, questions, reflection, share*, and *together* suggesting that the participants were pleased with the instructors and content of the sessions.

Appendix D: Event Evaluation

SESSION and STRUCTURE	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Topic Introduction					
Clarity of Content					
Level of Detail					
Relevance of Content					
Applicability (how transferable are the lessons?)					
Usefulness of Tools					
Order and Organization of Content					
Time Allotted for Discussions/Questions					
Structure/Flow					
Overall PD session					
Please provide additional comments on the PD session in general (clarity of content, relevance, usefulness of materials):					

VENUE & LOGISTICS	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Invitation					
Suitability of Location					
Space/Facilities					
Food and Hospitality					
Duration					
Comments:					

OUTCOME	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
How well did this professional development session meet your expectations?					
How well did the session address educational issues and practices that are important to your classroom or school?					
Comments:					
Please feel free to make any suggestions/recommendations for future professional development sessions:					

Your comments are valuable and help us to improve the mRLC programs and services. Thank you!

Appendix E: Continuing Professional Development Model

A number of professions including accountancy and pharmacy use the Continual Professional Development Model (CPD). According to the Ontario College of Pharmacists, the CPD model is

post-graduate professional education, involving a cycle by which individual practitioners assess their learning needs, create a personal learning plan, implement the plan, and evaluate the effectiveness of the education intervention as it applies to their professional practice." (Retrieved from the Ontario College of Pharmacists http://www.ocpinfo.com/practice-education/qa-program/learning-portfolio. June, 2014)

As a framework, the CPD model emphasizes professional development as an on-going process consisting of two main elements.

- **Self-Assessment of learning needs**
  While the CPD incorporates any type of education and training, the emphasis in CPD is on the self-assessment and ownership of learning outcomes rather than an individual learning activity.

- **On-going documentation in a learning portfolio**
  Individuals develop a learning portfolio that incorporates a wide range of materials. It includes a professional development log to document learning goals, objectives and resources or activities. The log includes target date to complete the objectives.

Professional Development Log

Name: Network:

Title / Activity					
Date:		**Facilitator**		**Location**	

Personal objectives for session:
What do you hope to achieve from this learning activity?

Preparation for this session:
How did you prepare for this session?

Which resource did you use to achieve your objective?

What type of learning activity was most useful in meeting your learning objective?

Impact		
How did this learning activity impact you?	**How did this learning activity impact your students?**	**How did this learning activity impact your practice as a whole?**
☐ Increased my knowledge ☐ Improved my confidence to apply what I have learned ☐ Confirmed that I am providing appropriate instruction for students ☐ Other	☐ Improved effectiveness or quality of my instruction ☐ Addressed the needs of Aboriginal, at-risk, EAL students ☐ Addressed concern or need ☐ Other	☐ Used the collaborative inquiry model with colleagues ☐ Modified existing practices ☐ Encouraged colleagues to pursue further learning ☐ Used action research to inform our practice ☐ Confirmed existing practice is appropriate ☐ Other