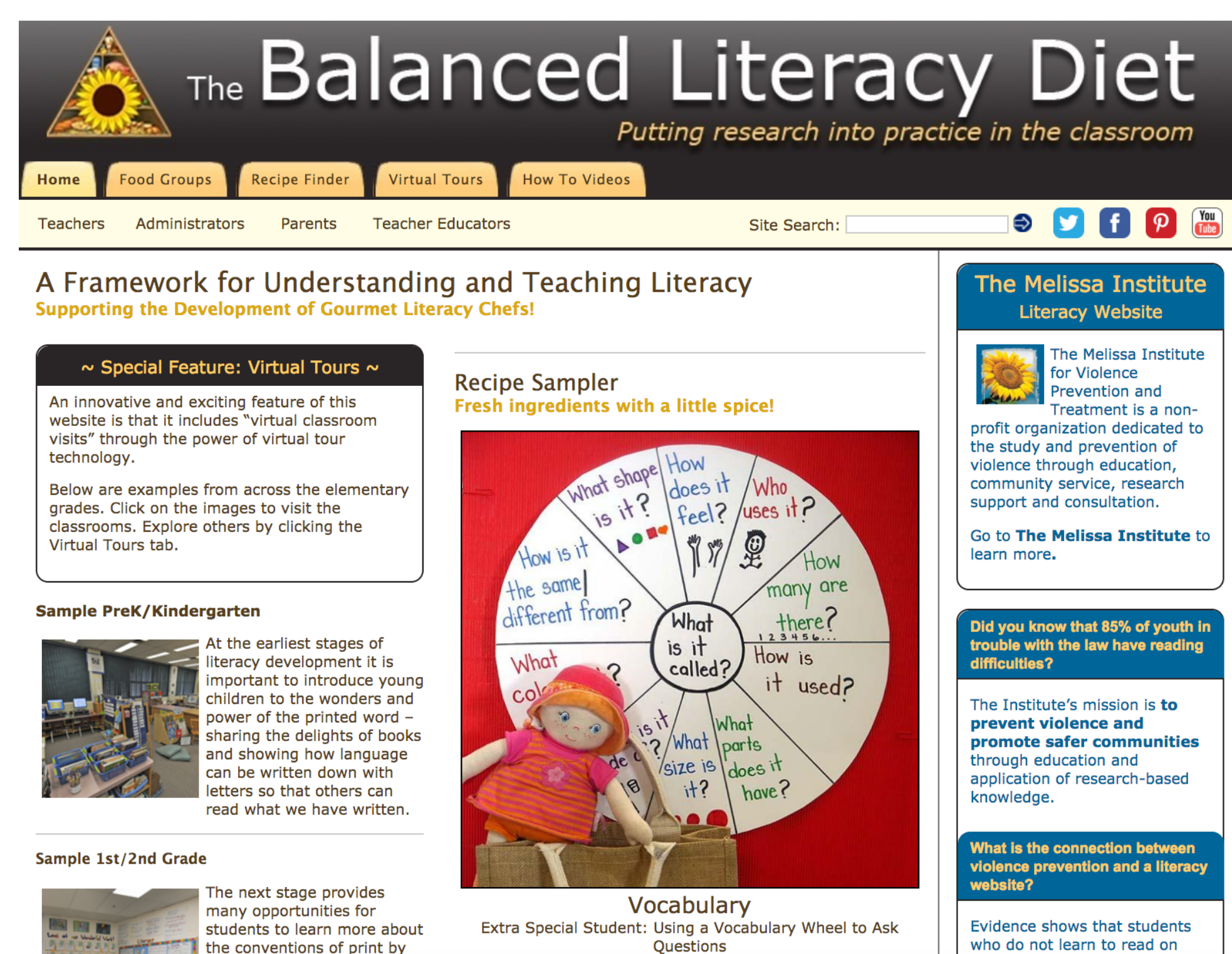


# Self-Directed Online Learners' Use of a Professional Development Website: The Power of Web Analytics

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## STUDY PURPOSE

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine how self-directed learners use a literacy professional development website. *The Balanced Literacy Diet: Putting Research into Practice in the Classroom* ([www.LitDiet.org](http://www.LitDiet.org)) is a multimedia professional development website for elementary teachers.



### SELF-DIRECTED ONLINE LEARNING:

Involves the negotiation of meaningful and irrelevant information, an individual's interest in and motivation to use online learning platforms and technologies, and the ability to self-monitor and consciously make sense of information.

**PIWIK**, an open-source web analytics tool, was used to investigate the patterns of use of *The Balanced Literacy Diet* website during the period of one year (June, 2016—May, 2017).

The following **research questions** guided the study:

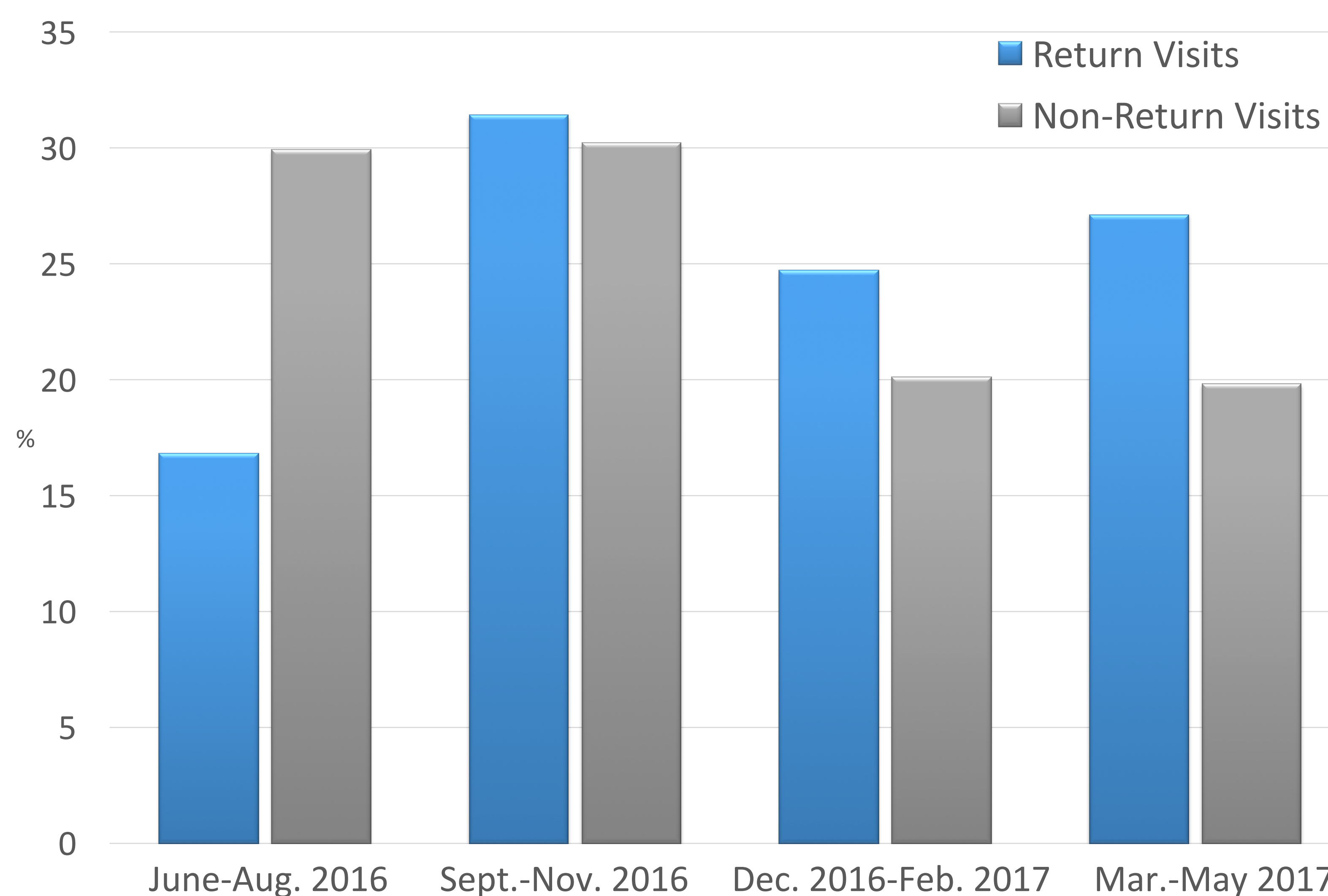
1. Over a period of one year, what are the overall patterns of use of a professional development literacy website?
2. How do patterns of use differ for return visits and non-return visits?
3. What are the patterns of behavior of return visits (self-directed online learners)?

## METHODOLOGY

Quantitative and qualitative analyses were employed to provide a window into the use of a professional development website. The quantitative component provided metrics about patterns of use and the qualitative component provided unique accounts of individual users. The purpose of including these accounts was to showcase different patterns of behavior of return visits.

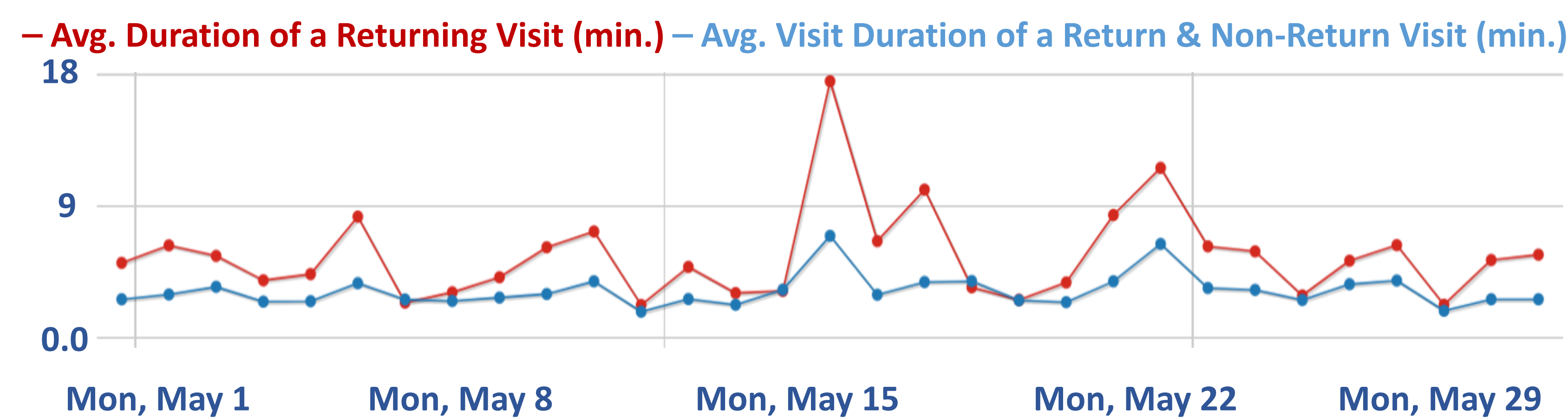
## RESULTS

### RETURN VISITS & NON-RETURN VISITS (JUNE, 2016-MAY, 2017)

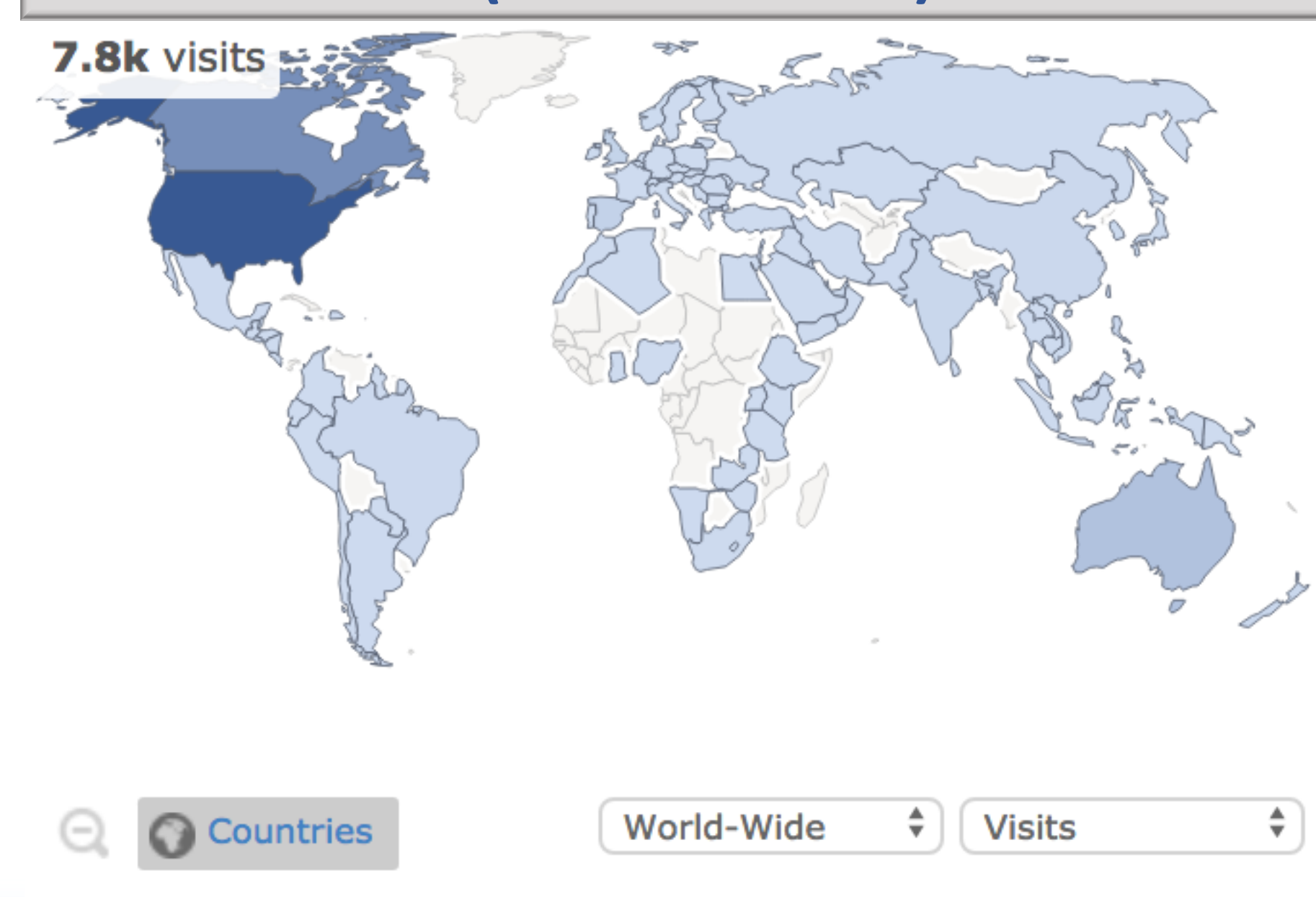


### OVERVIEW OF VISITS (MAY, 2017)

#### VISIT DURATION



#### VISITOR MAP (TOTAL VISITS)





#### TOP REFERRER WEBSITES

WEBSITE	VISITS
www.readingrockets.org	1,151
www.pinterest.com	957
www.oise.utoronto.ca	311
m.facebook.com	34

### PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOR: RETURN VISITS

Visitor logs of return users from **May 9, 2017 (n=112)** were analyzed through an inductive approach of open coding, comparisons, and categorizations.

PATTERN OF BEHAVIOR	DESCRIPTION	PROFILE EXAMPLE
COMMITTED LEARNER	Appears to have a relatively high level of engagement. This relatively high level of engagement is demonstrated through viewing videos and lesson plans, and selecting external links and content pages all related to the same topic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• REFERRAL WEBSITE, FIRST VISIT:  Reading Rockets</li><li>• ENTRY: On 6<sup>th</sup> visit to site, direct entry <a href="http://www.LitDiet.org">www.LitDiet.org</a></li><li>• VISIT DURATION: 22 actions in 38 minutes 45 seconds</li><li>• ACTIONS: Page views, downloads, and outlinks all related to oral language development</li></ul>
IMAGE SEEKER	Based on the qualitative analysis, "image seekers" appear to be self-directed learners who return to the site for the primary purpose of viewing and downloading photographs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• REFERRAL WEBSITE, FIRST VISIT:  Pinterest</li><li>• ENTRY: On 4<sup>th</sup> visit to site, direct entry <a href="http://www.LitDiet.org">www.LitDiet.org</a></li><li>• VISIT DURATION: 4 actions in 2 minutes 22 seconds</li><li>• ACTIONS: Downloads of images related to the concept schema development</li></ul>

## CONCLUSIONS

Using web analytics to examine the usage of a professional development website for teachers provides important information about self-directed online learning behaviors. Tracking users' self-direct online learning can contribute to improvements in online learning platforms and to the optimization of self-directed online learning experiences.