



LEARNing Landscapes

*Professional Development
in Education: Pushing the
Boundaries of Possibility*

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Statement of Purpose



LEARNIng Landscapes™ is an open access, peer-reviewed, online education journal supported by LEARN (Leading English Education and Resource Network). Published in the spring and autumn of each year, it attempts to make links between theory and practice and is built upon the principles of partnership, collaboration, inclusion, and attention to multiple perspectives and voices. The material in each publication attempts to share and showcase leading educational ideas, research, and practices in Quebec, and beyond, by welcoming articles, interviews, visual representations, arts-informed work, and multimedia texts to inspire teachers, administrators, and other educators to reflect upon and develop innovative possibilities within their own practices.

Review Board (Vol. 9 No. 1)

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Editorial

At no other time in our history has professional development been so important. Much of the future depends on education, and therefore, it is imperative that pre-service educators develop the most promising approaches for their classrooms and students. Teachers and school leaders must remain at the cutting edge of teaching and learning by creating opportunities for ongoing professional development that are research based, meaningful, and contextually and culturally relevant.

There are many different approaches to professional development. Traditionally, the most common one is the workshop that takes place over one or more days. Research suggests it is one of the least promising types of professional development because it is not tailored to individual needs, and there is no application and follow-up (Yoon, Duncan, Wen-Yu Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007). This can be mitigated somewhat if educators can attend in teams and subsequently work together in their respective contexts. Moreover, “one-offs” are better than not attending professional development sessions at all. They can provide good networking opportunities, offer a variety of perspectives from those attending, generate an atmosphere of professionalization, and show, especially with the current digital possibilities, actual examples of how new ideas can be implemented. I would argue that the most serious drawback is when these sessions are not based on sound research and are, rather, just “popular quick fixes” and “band-wagon” recipes for teaching and learning.

Recently, professional learning communities, or PLCs, have garnered a lot of interest because they are learner based, build on existing knowledge, and embrace educator agency, inquiry practices, reflection, and collaboration. When they are mandated from the top down, and focused solely on student achievement, they miss the mark (Hargreaves, 2007). In our work on PLCs with school leaders (Butler-Kisber, Robertson, Sklar, Stoll, & Whittingham, 2007; Butler-Kisber, Sklar, & Stewart, 2012), we found that an inquiry-based, international professional learning community (IPLC) provides an excellent form of professional development. An IPLC must be structured responsively, created in a psychologically safe space, and made up of heterogeneous small-group, inquiry-oriented, hands-on work, and whole-group work activities. As well, a successful IPLC must have a common focus for the inquiry, juxtapose a variety of educational contexts in culturally and contextually relevant ways through observations, discussions, and reflection during exchange visits, and must take place over time. Our results have shown that when carried out in this way, an IPLC provides a profoundly significant

professional learning experience. Schnellert's (2015) work on collaborative professional development corroborates this. He posits four pillars of professional development, which include structural supports, cultural and social/emotional supports, learning and process supports, and teacher agency.

Interestingly, the range of submissions for this issue provides excellent and nuanced examples of professional development experiences that reflect some or all of these basic principles. The invited commentaries set the stage nicely for the subsequent articles which are clustered, for the purposes of this editorial, in a series of themes that emanated from the work of the authors. In the issue itself, however, the articles are arranged in alphabetical order.

Invited Commentaries

Linda Darling-Hammond, Professor of Education Emeritus at Stanford University, and President and CEO of the Learning Policy Institute, in a compelling interview, suggests that the optimal occasions for professional development are when collaboration occurs among school staff both within and with other schools. She posits that successful schools are those which consider learners holistically and create relationships among teachers, parents, and community organizations to support students inside and outside of schools. **Avril Aitken**, Professor at Bishop's University in Lennoxville, Quebec, makes a strong plea, from a social justice perspective, for educators to get the necessary professional development in order to embrace and implement the important recommendations of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report. These recommendations are an attempt to redress the inequities that have existed for Aboriginals in Canada. She suggests that professional learning is emotional and thus, educators require an "emotional readiness" in order to act on the reconciliation practices in their classrooms. She believes this can be accomplished most effectively through collaborative and practitioner-based inquiry. **Megan Webster**, who is a teacher, teacher educator, and professional development consultant in Montreal, discusses in her interview how she considers that high-quality professional development is, "one of the greatest levers for change that we have." She advocates, from personal experiences, for professional learning communities that are practice focused, ones that give educators access to excellent models, provide feedback in a supportive environment, and are sustained over time. **Dean Fink**, international author and educational consultant from Ontario, contrasts market-driven, competitive educational models that lead to top-down, mandated professional development against those that put professionalization at the core of professional development and which reflect the qualities mentioned earlier. He shares with interesting personal experiences how his

involvement in both a professional learning community and a collaborative leadership program contributed substantially to his career-long professional learning.

Emphasizing Equity and Social Justice in Professional Development

Wiltse and **Boyko** describe how they used a responsive reading approach, which focused on LGBT issues, with a group of teachers who considered themselves anti-homophobic, but resisted teaching LGBT texts in their classrooms. They share how one teacher in particular became impassioned by the exercise and encouraged the others to question their stances underscoring the potential of collaboration. The authors recommend strongly the need for moral and institutional support for professional development that confronts LGBT issues in classrooms and schools. **Jones** and **Browne** describe how they used ongoing professional development workshops and reflective practice with four urban pre-school teachers that helped them to understand and value culturally responsive pedagogy for their classrooms. They emphasize the need to start in the early grades and foster culturally responsive pedagogy to support and ensure the success of all students. **Connery** suggests that professional development that promotes social justice is best achieved through daily, ongoing reflective interactions with colleagues. She describes how her personal experience with her bilingual teaching assistant pushed her thinking about bilingual learners in ways beyond what she had acquired in workshops and at conferences. She advocates for including the intercultural experiences of colleagues to address social justice issues. **Schnellert**, whom I mentioned above, along with **Kozak** and **Moore**, describe The Aboriginal Early Literacy Project, in which two collaborative inquiry communities co-created professional learning spaces that encouraged the contributions of diverse group members. This form of professional development helped to transform practice as the teachers became “inquirers and possibilizers” and paid particular attention to social justice, equity, and student funds of knowledge as a result. **Richards** discusses a transdisciplinary research approach that she implemented with a group of PhD students. This approach integrates content, theory, and methodology from diverse areas of study to consider more broadly “life world problems rather than more specific discipline-oriented ones.” Their work together helped to focus on the social justice issues around economic inequities between the rich and poor in the United States. The author shares how her active involvement in the process forced her to reexamine her own thinking about conceptions of poverty.

Valuing and Building on Personal, Practical Knowledge

Macintyre Latta, **Hamann**, and **Wunder** suggest, as others have before them (Connolly, Clandinin, & He, 1997; Elbaz, 1983), the importance of valuing and

building upon the personal, practical knowledge of educators, in this instance those involved in the Carnegie Project for the Education Doctorate (CPED). This interesting initiative structures opportunities for local educators to develop their practices while participating in a doctoral cohort and maintaining their work commitments. The CPED study/work space creates “bottom-up” learning that emanates from practice and validates this knowledge. **Guerra, Hanratty, Onofre, Tedeschi, Wilenchik, and Knobel** share the lessons learned from their participation in an action research project that involved a group of reading teacher specialists in an urban elementary school in the U.S. The project was designed to involve multilingual parents in supporting their children’s literacy learning at home. The article highlights the professional learning benefits gained by the teachers by taking ownership for this work and also by collaborating with each other in the process. **Kubota, Menon, Redlich-Amirav, and Saleh** describe how through narrative inquiry into their own personal and professional learning, they were able to create a safe space for sharing as they worked alongside each other and built on their own and others’ practical knowledge. They helpfully acknowledge the tensions in the work and suggest that the closeness of the group allowed them to work through and benefit from what became learning opportunities for all.

Including Art Making in Professional Development

The early work of Dewey, the thrust of inquiry or project-based learning, the role of multiple intelligences in learning, the role of the arts in creativity and innovation, and the burgeoning Maker or Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Movement, which has grown exponentially because of the capability of digital technologies, all emphasize the important role that the “doing,” or embodiment, brings to learning, including professional development. **Torzillo** presents a case for art making in professional development in her article about the importance of dance education in the primary school curriculum. She shares how her experience at the Dance Exchange Summer Institute contributed significantly to her understanding of the importance of art making for learning, for nurturing the self, and for the empowerment of teachers. The article by **White and Lemieux** describes a project in which pre-service, undergraduate teachers attempted to articulate their identities through the creation of three-dimensional art. In particular, it focuses on one project participant’s work that was produced with the accompanying reflections about it over time. The authors argue that there is a definite need for arts-based work in professional learning because it acknowledges and validates the material culture and the world in which pre-service teachers live.

Illustrating the Role of Dissonance and Juxtaposition in Professional Development

Thong explores the relevance of reflection and reflexivity in promoting professional development. She argues that experiencing unfamiliar contexts is an excellent basis for reflection and growth. She shares her personal experience of studying abroad and how the juxtaposition/dissonance of experiencing the “strange” in contrast with her own “familiar” context pushed her reflections and provided an opportunity for growth and change. **Gulla, Pinhasi-Vittorio, and Lehner-Quam** share how they worked with a group of teachers and teacher educators to juxtapose and deconstruct the structure and language of the Common Core State Standards using inquiry and creativity activities within the context of a safe space. As a result, they were able to open avenues for dialogue and possibilities for growth and change within the group.

Focusing on Professional Development for School Principals

Fichtman Dana, Marrs-Morford, and Roberts believe that sustaining the learning capacity of school leaders is critical for school success. They were involved in the Indiana Principal Leadership Institute (IPLI), which focused on teaching school leaders how to conduct action research. Each participant was involved in designing, implementing, and presenting the results of an action research project. Ongoing seminars facilitated this work and the school leaders were supported by mentors during the entire process. The three most important take-away lessons of the project were to start small; anticipate challenges that are associated with having principals focus on their own leadership practices; and to recognize that challenges are what produce growth. **Zepeda, Jimenez, and Lanoue** examined Principal Learning Communities (PLCs) in which school leaders participated in monthly meetings over a three-year period to work on processes, content, and skills to help transform their schools. Three major findings were that beliefs only matter if growth matters, effective professional development provides a safe haven for change, and that it takes transformational professional development to build the necessary culture for school change.

A Final Word

It seems appropriate in this issue to give the final word on professional development to **Hargreaves**, who has been a major contributor to the scholarly work on leadership, change, and professional development for several decades. In this reprint of his pivotal article entitled, “Push, Pull and Nudge: The Future of Teaching and Educational Change,” he draws on recent research on teacher collegiality and professional learning communities to distill the nature, benefits, and drawbacks of collegial relations in

high-stakes reform. He suggests that the change will only work by inspiring teachers through appealing to the moral principles inherent in their work, or by putting them in situations that require changes in practice in the hopes that this will lead to changes in their beliefs. He argues that sometimes teachers have to be drawn or “pulled” into professional learning and sometimes they have to be “pushed,” but cautions that the pulling should not be so weak that collaboration does not occur at all, nor should pushing be so excessive that it is paramount to bullying. For successful collaboration and change to occur, he recommends “nudging,” a delicate balancing of the push and pull and providing deliberate arrangements that will enhance professional learning.

LBK

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Commentary

If Education Is the Key to Reconciliation, How Will Professional Development Contribute to Unlocking the Process?

Avril Aitken, Bishop's University

ABSTRACT

This text considers the urgency of teacher learning, given the recent culmination of Canada's six-year Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and in light of the position taken by the TRC that, "Education holds the key to reconciliation." Beginning with a reflection on the author's formative encounters as a practitioner, the text goes on to question how teachers will be prepared for the significant role they have been called on to play. The latter section takes into account that professional learning is emotional and cerebral, and points to the need for emotional readiness among teachers participating in reconciliation practices with students.

 Last July I spent a week at the Harrington School of Communication and Media, at the University of Rhode Island, learning about digital media tools and technologies. I accompanied other teacher educators who were drawn to the session because their current research intersects importantly with digital literacy. Significantly, another colleague gave this particular learning opportunity a strong endorsement. She was not alone; the institute's bold claim on the website states, "75% of participants have rated the Summer Institute in Digital Literacy the BEST professional development program they have ever experienced in their entire career!" Further down on the page, readers are invited to "[j]oin us for a once-in-a-lifetime experience" (Media Education Lab, nd).

I will say at the outset that I am skeptical of professional development that is designed for me, by someone else, and am cautious when faced with hyperbolic marketing claims, such as the above. I am also troubled by the corporatization of opportunities for teacher learning, which include the kind of “context-free” sessions that provide generic materials (Hardy & Rönnerman, 2011), notably linked to some form of accountability and numeric measures of success (Derrick, 2013). Dadds (2014) suggests that such “delivery” approaches to professional development imagine an unproblematic transmission of new knowledge. In contrast, she claims that we need to acknowledge that,

the journey of professional growth into new and better practices is often unpredictable; often non-linear; often emotional as well as cerebral. It demands the capacity and strength to ask questions; to analyse and interpret feedback; to discipline the emotions generated by self-study; to change established practices in the light of new understanding; to remain interested and professionally curious. (p. 15)

This kind of professional growth is captured by Linda Kroll (2007) who, in a retrospective look at her life as an educator, recounts key encounters with people and texts and their relationship to what she calls her “own theoretical development” (p. 103). Kroll’s account reveals that her path was marked by challenges, questions, and ongoing self-directed inquiry—all of which enriched her life. She concludes,

The constant reviewing and reconstruction are what makes teaching and learning so interesting. It keeps alive the purpose of what we do and allows us to stay focused on our mission of making schools a better place for everyone who participates in them. (p. 103)

In considering my own formative encounters as a teacher-learner, there are two that are most significant: working with the Naskapi Nation of Kawawachimach for over three decades, and having an early career experience with action research, informed by the writings of Carr and Kemmis (1986), Cummins (1986), Freire (1970), and Grundy (1987). My initiation to classroom-based inquiry in a remote school serving a First Nation profoundly affected the way I think as a teacher—before, during, and after classroom interactions. While it is popular to use the term “reflection” to describe the thinking inherent to the kind of inquiry I had undertaken, doing so does not capture how reflection can become a philosophical way of being (Hardy & Rönnerman, 2011). Action research changed who I am as a teacher.

Since those early moments of researching my own practice, I have been drawn to collaborative and participatory action-focused inquiry. So you may be wondering why I would choose to attend a summer institute that makes the kind of pitch that seems incongruous with my own approach to professional learning. The answer to that question is “reconciliation.” Yes, I went to the summer institute motivated by confounding questions and heightened concerns: How can I contribute to reconciliation—as a citizen and as an educator—at this pivotal moment in our Nation’s becoming. And how can digital tools facilitate the process?

If you are wondering what I mean by pivotal moment or by reconciliation, you are not alone. In a short informal survey of 20 seasoned educators, I found that about half were not aware of the six-year process of Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission. To a great degree they were unsure if it had anything to do with their lives or their educational practice. Of those who were aware, few knew of the *Calls to Action* (TRC, 2015a) that were released with the gripping executive summary in June 2015. The TRC documents recount vivid and painful testimony, which captures the experiences of the generations of Indigenous people whose lives were directly and/or indirectly impacted by residential schooling. The ongoing and pervasive effects of this and other devastating colonial policies are a legacy that we all own as Canadians. This is why the TRC outcomes include *Calls to Action*. They are intended to engage all citizens in contributing to “restoring balance,” as the Chair of the Commission, Justice Murray Sinclair, stated in a short video on the main page of the TRC website. Beyond the collective efforts of Canadians, educators have a significant role to play. Justice Sinclair (2014) explains this in a text written for the Manitoba Teachers’ Society, “It is precisely because education was the primary tool of oppression of Aboriginal people, and miseducation of all Canadians, that we have concluded that education holds the key to reconciliation” (p. 7).

In different areas in the country, educators are responding to this. For example, in September 2015, the BC Teacher’s Federation launched an information-rich, interactive e-book, *Project of Heart: Illuminating the Hidden History of Indian Residential Schools in BC*. The dedication states:

Our goals are to honour the survivors and their families, and to help educate Canadians about the atrocious history and ongoing legacy of residential schools. Only when we understand our shared history can we move forward together in a spirit of reconciliation. (BCTF, 2015, p. i)

As education holds the key, one of the *Calls to Action* is to “Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students” (TRC, 2015a, p. 7). In 2014, Sinclair noted that curriculum focusing on residential schools has been/is in the process of being implemented in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, British Columbia, Manitoba, Alberta, and Saskatchewan. Ontario’s response is described in a June 2015 Toronto Star article; significantly, the headline reads, “Teachers need to be educated about residential schools before students, says TDSB official” (June 2, 2015). In the article, the author, writes, “York University Professor Susan Dion, an aboriginal expert on First Nations education, said education is key to reconciliation ‘because we need to know what we’re reconciling about—and at this point, Canadians aren’t really sure’” (Brown, 2015, np). As my informal survey suggests, this may also be the case for many teachers.

Somewhat differently, the role of teacher *educators* was established in 2010, with the publication of the Accord on Indigenous Education by the Association of Canadian Deans of Education. While the impact of residential schooling is not explicitly named among the 32 points in the Accord, related elements are present. For example, teacher educators are called on:

- To foster all education candidates’ political commitment to Indigenous education, such that they move beyond awareness and act within their particular sphere of influence.
- To encourage all students, teacher candidates, and graduate students to explore and question their own sense of power and privilege (or lack thereof) within Canadian society as compared with others in that society. (ACDE, 2010, p. 7)

Since the release of the Accord, changes in Teacher Education programs have been noted. These include the development of new courses, the increasing presence of Indigenous educators and Elders in Schools and Faculties of Education, and strengthened university-community collaborations. Within courses, it is possible to find increased attention to Indigenous ontology and epistemology, settler identity, colonization and decolonization practices (Wiens et al., 2015).

Further underscoring the role of higher education in the reconciliation process, Universities Canada, on behalf of their 97 member institutions, released 13 principles on Indigenous education developed by university leaders. The principles represent an answer to the TRC’s call to universities. Like the Accord, there is attention to supporting

Indigenous students, fostering collaboration and intercultural engagement, and “providing greater exposure and knowledge for non-Indigenous students on the realities, histories, cultures and beliefs of Indigenous people in Canada” (UC, 2015).

I could, at this point, begin to describe how I have been using my new knowledge of media and technology tools to realize some of the goals laid out for me in documents like the *Accord*, the *Principles on Indigenous Education*, and the *TRC Calls to Action*. I could comment on how the students’ semi-public practice of blogging is creating a space for them to work through some of the emotionally charged and challenging questions they are encountering in their own exploration of Canada’s dark past; I could detail how they are producing short films for augmented reality points around our campus—to foster community members’ awareness of Indigenous issues, knowledge, and presence. I could also explain the benefits of using Twitter daily to see what is significant for reconciliation—because I follow Justice Sinclair, Wab Kinew,¹ Charlene Bearhead,² Heather E. McGregor,³ and others who are interested in reconciliation.

However, for the purpose of this text, I want to make the point that there has not been much discussion of how professional development for reconciliation will be organized and carried out with teachers in the field. While there is public reference to school board and teacher federation efforts to begin the professional development, the question of what should comprise the learning process has not been widely discussed. In writing about teacher participation in reconciliation in different areas of the globe, Zembylas, Kendeou, and Michaelidou (2011) note that understanding teacher perspectives on reconciliation is essential. “Is it peaceful coexistence? Is it empathy? Is it forgiving and forgetting?” (p. 527). Multiple views exist and it is likely that across Canada divergent perspectives are held, which would have implications for moving forward. So where do we start?

Among the points in the *Calls to Action*, point ii of Call 62 focuses on “Provid[ing] the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.” While this is essential, it does not seem to get to the heart of trauma, its long-term impact, and the nature of reconciliation. On the other hand, *Call to Action 57* directly targets “Professional Development and Training for Public Servants,” among which teachers might be included. It calls for:

The provision of education to public servants on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law,

and Aboriginal–Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism. (TRC, 2015a, p. 7)

The above recognizes the knowledge and particular capacities that might be required to understand the significance of the trauma that has given rise to a need for a reconciliation process. Call 57 is directed toward “federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments,” which begs the question: *Who will take the lead in professional development for teachers?*

Dadds (2014) makes the important point that professional growth—in general—is both emotional and cerebral. When it comes to participating in reconciliation processes, Zembylas et al. (2011) note the significance of the emotional readiness of the teachers, which has an impact on their willingness to be involved. They describe that readiness requires a belief that reconciliation is important, a plan to take action, and confidence and comfort in doing so. There may be ambivalent emotions, which as Zembylas et al. explain, “are not attributes of individuals, but represent provisional readings and judgements” (p. 535). This can be advantageous, as looking at ambivalent emotions can be part of pedagogical practices that lead to greater readiness. Finally, Zembylas et al. mention the importance of “structural support (e.g. teacher training, appropriate curricula) provided by government policy measures” (p. 535), and they indicate that if teacher-led reconciliation is imposed, then teacher support will be unlikely.

Preparing teachers for their role in reconciliation is not something that can be delivered, packaged, or offered as decontextualized, professional development. In the short introductory TRC video in which Justice Sinclair defines reconciliation, he notes that it may take several generations of concerted effort to “restore balance” (TRC, 2015b). In the discussion of how we will move ahead, we will have to keep this in mind. One appropriate approach would be to privilege practitioner learning (Derrick, 2013), in which “practice and learning are collaborative – knowledge, expertise, ideas, questions, projects and problems are shared and embodied within teams of colleagues, formal and informal, rather than in isolated individuals” (p. 277). It’s unrealistic to expect that all educators will take up practitioner-based inquiry around reconciliation, but it is entirely reasonable to suggest that we can sit down together and share our responses to the question, “What do we understand by reconciliation?”

Notes

1. Wab Kinew is a journalist, hip-hop artist, and author; he is the Associate Vice President for Indigenous Relations at the University of Winnipeg.
2. Charlene Bearhead is the Education Lead at the Center for Truth and Reconciliation at the University of Manitoba.
3. Heather E. McGregor is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Ottawa, recent PhD graduate of UBC's Center for Historical Consciousness.

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Avril Aitken is a professor at the School of Education of Bishop's University, in Sherbrooke, Quebec. After graduating from McGill's teacher education program in 1980, she taught for two decades while continuing her studies. She went on to work as a school board and Ministry of Education consultant. She now participates in collaborative inquiry with educators in rural and remote communities. As a teacher educator and researcher, she seeks to understand the identity-making venture of teachers—in particular its implications for the possibility of educating for a more democratic, diverse, and sustainable world.



Commentary

Professional Learning: A Community of Practice for Great Schools

Linda Darling-Hammond

ABSTRACT

In this interview, Linda Darling-Hammond describes the optimal way in which professional learning can be developed and implemented for teachers and school leaders. She emphasizes that teachers need to collaborate within a school and also have the opportunity to be part of a community with other schools. She explains that schools that are most successful are those where teachers, parents, and community organizations create relationships that support students inside and outside the school. As information access increases, she hopes that schools will be able to give students the skills to “learn how to learn” in order to use that information to contribute constructively to society.

From the perspective of what you’ve called the “blueprint for great schools” and your extensive involvement in educational policy issues, how do you envision what the best possible ways are for integrating professional learning into the lives of teachers and school leaders?

We should keep in mind at least two different pathways for professional learning. One is, of course, the work that teachers and leaders are doing in schools that’s immediately in front of them: we need to structure the kind of collaboration time for planning and analysis, for coaching and developing new pedagogy and ideas, and reflecting and refining the work in the school that is needed to create a coherent and thoughtful and continuously improving school environment.

And much of the impetus for that kind of work comes from the members of that school community themselves. We also need pathways that allow people to learn from others outside the school; that can include teachers in networks with other teachers, often subject-matter networks, schools that network with other schools, access to ongoing institutes providing learning opportunities that connect curriculum and student needs, providing knowledge that teachers can bring back into the school environment in the way that I described earlier. If we could conceptualize professional learning in those ways, rather than the idea that it's mostly someone coming in from the outside for an afternoon PowerPoint session, we would see a much greater impact from the learning opportunities that educators encounter.

Can you describe an example of such an initiative that you are aware of?

One that I can think of is the very excellent Readers / Writers Workshop run by Lucy Calkins at Teachers' College at Columbia University. They offer institutes in the summer time for a week or two where teachers come together and learn new strategies; they may develop curriculum and units and ideas to take back. They get access to coaching and a network of colleagues when they are trying things out during the school year: they can re-engage with the learning communities that they began the journey with in the summer in a variety of ways as they're trying things and refining their practices. Quite often, if the school is involved in a learning journey school-wide, teachers can connect the work to their colleagues in the school and coach each other and continuously problem solve and refine the methods and the strategies that they're implementing throughout the year. Then, if they want to, they can get another dose of a more advanced aspect of the pedagogy the following summer and so on.

Where do you feel the responsibility for excellent professional learning lies in the educational system?

It lies at almost every level, in one way. Obviously educators themselves have responsibility as professionals to continuously learn in order meet the needs of their students. It certainly lies with school site leaders who need to construct learning environments that are productive and supportive for all of the adults, not only the professionals in the building and paraprofessionals, but also often engaging parents in learning about how to support their kids and be partners in the process. Then, of course, there's the district level or the regional level creating the funding streams and the opportunities for people to learn across school sites. In some contexts, the federal

level may also be involved in both funding and incentivizing high-quality approaches to professional learning and making sure that there are resources available for people to tap in the field for their learning.

Do you have any examples where parents have been involved in professional learning that you think are exemplary?

In New York City some years ago in 1989, the then-chancellor, Joe Fernandez, put out a call for educators, community organizations, and parents to join together to create new school designs. In the 25 years since then, New York City has almost eliminated the big factory model zoned high school and has created hundreds of small, innovative public schools, many of them in partnership between community organizations and parents and educators, who have been designing and implementing that work together. In that process, I saw many schools where parents, teachers, and principals together would engage in professional learning about aspects of the school design, even about pedagogical practices, like how will we create a strong literacy environment for all children. Parents have in some places been invited to participate in learning about various learning and teaching practices and then helping to think about the role of all of the parties in that school community in creating that kind of home and school environment.

How were they initially engaged in wanting to become part of this? How did that outreach happen?

In many cases there were schools and educators already who were working closely with parents, knew who the parent leaders were, were in communication with the community, had those relationships and ties, and they built upon them to reach further into the community with parents and community members as guides. I will also say that the places where the ties are the strongest between schools and parents and community members are often those where schools extend beyond the old routines for parent engagement, which have consisted of back-to-school night and perhaps parent-teacher conferences in the elementary school (these often disappear by secondary school in traditional schools), asking a few parents to sit on a committee, that's been our traditional model in the United States at least. These are schools where parents are involved in many more ways. The parent-teacher relationship is designed so that it doesn't only have to occur during that 10-minute parent-teacher's conference: teachers have time in their schedule put aside or paid for additionally to meet with

parents, to do home visits, to be available after school, to engage parents in the work of creating a parent-education social calendar. Community schools are a place where a lot of this goes on.

People like Jim Comer [Dr James P. Comer], who created something called the School Development Model, designed ways that parents and staff are all working together to understand child development and then to build a lot of networks, communications, and linkages between parents, participants, and volunteers in the school and partners with teachers and the faculty themselves.

Many professionals feel that professional learning is often avoided by those who might need it most. How can this be rectified?

You have to create a context. We're moving beyond the old, isolated egg-crate classroom where teachers would be...the job was conceptualized as teachers going into that egg-crate classroom, closing their door and teaching on their own. In the new wave of preparation for teachers who are coming in, I think that's pretty much a thing of the past for those people who are newly entering. The idea that you are part of a collaborative professional community, that practice is to be shared, that that's what it means to be a professional, etc. is becoming much better planted in schools all around the globe. Certainly it's not universal, but we've moved a long way in that direction.

I think that once you can create a professional community in a school, where people are talking about practice, in and out of each other's classrooms, sharing aspects of their practice, it becomes much harder to avoid professional learning. First of all, it's all around you and it's intruding into your daily space. But second of all, as you create a set of norms and ways of being and an expectation that everyone is growing and learning, more and more people will seek out as well as graciously receive opportunities for learning. If there is a teacher who is just not oriented that way and really needs to improve aspects of his or her practice, at some point the supervisory process has to kick in and that has to become part of the expectation. I like teacher evaluation systems that involve teachers in goal setting where, together with either peers or a site leader, each teacher thinks about, "where do I want to grow, what do I want to build in my practice, how will I access the opportunities to learn about that." That puts a lot of agency in the hands of the teacher and it also creates an expectation that everyone on this ship is moving towards a continuously improving practice.

What's your vision for education in the next decade?

Taking a U.S. perspective for a moment, I hope that over the next decade we're about to have a new Elementary and Secondary Education Act which will bring us, I hope, out of the No Child Left Behind era to a substantial extent. And I actually hope that part of what we do over the next decade is emulate some of the lessons we can learn from our neighbour to the north, from Canada, where I think the approach to improving education has been more focused on building professional capacity, developing what Michael Fullan calls "professional capital," which means collective knowledge, skill, and commitment, rather than treating teaching individualistically. I hope we will be focused on trying to meet the needs of students both inside and out of school, with a stronger health and welfare system for families and young people in addition to the investments that will be more equitable in our schools. We, of course, have a very inequitable resourcing of schools and huge increases in poverty and income inequality which add on to the challenges that many educators face.

We're making some progress in a number of states in the U.S. and I see this happening in Canada as well, towards a type of learning that acknowledges that our young people are going to have to be able to learn to learn, because the pace of knowledge production is so fast. The changeability of society, technologies, the economy is such a constant in the landscape that we need to give them the tools to be able to investigate, inquire, weigh and balance and analyze information, learn continuously from that information and environment and put that information to creative use to solve big problems. In the next decade we're going to see big changes in the way we conceptualize learning, the way we organize teaching and schooling to support it, and the kinds of outcomes we expect from it.

What do you think the biggest hurdles will be?

There are many. One big hurdle is, and this is true around the globe, the extent to which we as human beings are willing to accept and sometimes reinforce inequality, unequal opportunity to learn. That manifests differently in different societies and it manifests to different extents. There are some societies that are much more focused on and supportive of equity than others, but I think widespread inequality is a big obstacle, because our social contract won't work if only some people get access to the kind of learning that I described and the kind of learning opportunities that produce it. For any society today to survive and succeed, every member of the society needs to be very well educated. I think a failure to commit to that goal is one critical obstacle.

There are folks in the world who see education as a marketplace, rather than a public resource and a public good, and so there are some big battles going on in various countries and around the world to privatize education, to attach fees that are only available to wealthy families, not to poor families, to differentiate the kind of opportunities that are available to create a competitive environment where schools have incentive to keep and push out kids who may have greater learning needs, rather than incentive to meet and support the greatest possible learning for all people so that they can contribute to society later. I think that's an obstacle. I think a third obstacle is the fact that everyone has gone to school and has an idea about what school should be, and often members of the public, parents, policy makers, even educators, can become tradition-bound in ways that point us towards the schools of the past, rather than the educational opportunities we need for the future. It's going to be important for people to be able to see what innovative and successful schools are doing so that they can build new images of what's possible and then develop the will to pursue that for all children.



Linda Darling-Hammond is the President and CEO of the Learning Policy Institute and the Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education Emeritus at Stanford University. She founded the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education and served as the faculty sponsor of the Stanford Teacher Education Program, which she helped to redesign. She continues to teach part-time in the Stanford Graduate School of Education. She previously served as Director of the RAND Corporation's education program and as the William F. Russell Professor of Education at Columbia University, Teachers College. Darling-Hammond is past president of the American Educational Research Association and recipient of its awards for Distinguished Contributions to Research, Lifetime Achievement, and Research-to-Policy.



Commentary

A Professional Learning Odyssey

Dean Fink

ABSTRACT

Through the use of personal anecdotes drawn from a long career as a professional educator, the author contends that professional development for professional educators is not just an isolated “quick fix” program now and then, or a series of performance-focused activities, but rather, professional learning opportunities exist in multiple, diverse, and occasionally in unusual and unexpected situations and contexts throughout one’s career. He suggests that what all teachers and school leaders require for professional learning to flourish is both time and space, a clear sense of purpose based on student learning, learning opportunities that are appropriate to roles and career stage, and the support and trust from leadership both inside and outside of schools and districts. It is professional learning, not tests, targets, or performance training, that increases students’ learning.

A few years ago, the assistant superintendent of a mid-sized American school district asked me to conduct a workshop with the principals and assistants of her city based on my book, *Leadership for Mortals* (2005). What she liked about the book was its focus on leadership for student learning that I had defined broadly as learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, learning to live together (UNESCO, 1996), and learning to live sustainably (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). I spent a day and a half with 150 very engaged and thoughtful school leaders and came away feeling my work had really made a difference. After I finished, the newly appointed superintendent spoke to the school leaders. He was young, articulate, and in private conversations had let me know he was on the “way up.” The school district had chosen him over the well-liked assistant superintendent who had invited me. His PowerPoint

presentation perseverated on each school's scores on the state's standardized tests and his analysis of successes and failures, mixed in with commendations for successes, which as I discovered, were schools located mostly in white neighbourhoods, and failures that were almost exclusively in black communities. There was nothing in the speech that was motivational, or suggested approaches to improvement, or even available support, but rather, it consisted of rhetorical exhortations for everyone to do better or there would be unstated consequences. I left for home feeling more deflated than a New England Patriots' football.¹

This vignette is a microcosm of the ongoing international clash between two very different paradigms of educational change—one that sees school leaders and teachers as professional educators who guide and support students in their pursuit of broad learning goals, and the other based on the primacy of markets and a production model of education that considers education to be a commodity that is bought and sold—and students and their parents are the consumers who choose among competing educational settings. In this production model of how education should work, often called New Public Management (NPM), teachers are merely human capital, not professionals to whom society entrusts its children's education, while principals are managers of the productivity of this “workforce,” not leaders of learning, and the results of these efforts are neatly and simplistically codified into easily understood and manipulated numbers based on the bottom line—students' test scores, rather than evaluations based on the full range of students' learning experiences (Leana, 2011). By ignoring the complexities of teaching, and leading and reducing these activities to commodities to be measured, these value-added metrics derived from increments in students' attainment enable policy makers at all levels, such as the aforementioned superintendent, to glibly draw conclusions about teachers' competence, principals' leadership, and district and even state (or provincial) departments' efficacy. Like the stock market or quarterly business reports, a school's success goes up or down depending on the numbers, and in more recent times, particularly in some of the states of the United States, teachers and principals' salaries fluctuate accordingly.

In this edition of *LEARNing Landscapes* dedicated to professional development, the first question to be asked is: “What are the educational purposes for which leaders and teachers need professional developing?” and second, “How do planners of professional activities create conditions that will enhance their learning?” The key word here is “professional.” Programs and activities designed to further the goals of the production model with its narrow focus on test scores or managerial functions can hardly be called professional. I like Andy Hargreaves' (2003) term for this kind of activity, *performance training sects*, in which intensive implementation support is given to educators “but only

in relation to highly prescriptive interventions in basic areas of the curriculum that demand unquestioned professional competence” such as reading or mathematics that potentially can lock “teachers and students into cycles of low level dependency rather than offering a first step towards something better” (p. 7). The “something better” he defines as “professional learning communities.” In my work with Andy we parsed the term this way:

- communities where diverse people have a shared commitment to a common purpose, to each other as people in pursuing that purpose, and to acknowledgement and inclusion of minority views in collective decision making,
- learning of the students, the adults, and the organization more generally,
- professional in how they value grown up norms of difference, disagreement and debate about the best way they promote, value, and bring together formal evidence and experiential knowledge and intuition as a basis for decision making (Hargreaves & Fink, p. 126).

In my long career that has encompassed just about every role on the educational spectrum, I have experienced several different kinds of professional learning communities that seemed to meet my professional needs at various stages of my career. As a young teacher I didn’t really know what I didn’t know. In my third year I was promoted to department head in a secondary school largely because I was the only specialist in my field; it certainly wasn’t because of my proven leadership ability at the time. What kept my head above water and helped me to avoid doing stupid things was the opportunity to work with a few experienced and very professional department heads in other subject fields who not only willingly shared their explicit knowledge of educational practice with me, but also their tacit knowledge drawn from their years in the job.

A few years later I had my first (and only) opportunity to participate in an entire school as a professional learning community. Lord Byron High School was a new and purposely innovative school dedicated to optimum learning experiences for all students within a humane and caring environment. Elsewhere (Fink, 2000), I chronicled the many features that made this school unique, but for the purposes of this essay what contributed to Byron as a professional learning community was the principal’s determination to break the mold on secondary schooling by creating both the time and space for professionals to work together across disciplines to promote learning for all students. He created cross-disciplinary departments; I was the head of social sciences. He arranged for workspaces so that related departments shared offices, and by creative timetabling provided the time for people to plan together. His staff was a

mixture of mid-career professionals who were not afraid to “rock the boat” and bright young people with a thirst for learning. The principal had only one rule for the staff: the coffee will only be available in the staff room. Coffee-addicted teachers had to go to the staff room during lunch and breaks where inevitably discussions of educational philosophy and practice dominated the conversations. As one of my former colleagues who became a highly successful principal declared, “the sheer intellectual acuity of those discussions in the staff room was the best P.D. I ever had.” The principal would often wander into the staff room, make a provocative statement, and leave with a big smile on his face while the rest of us wrestled with the topic he had planted. My three years at Byron were a turning point in my career. For the first time I saw leadership at the school and district levels that really made a difference for students and I decided that was the path I wanted to follow.

When I became the principal of my own secondary school, I entered another very different professional learning community—the district’s principals’ association. The district was created from a number of smaller districts and the founding Director of Education emphasized the need for quality leadership at all levels. For example, he organized a leadership program for 32 prospective leaders that met 12 times a school year and spent two weekends together, all funded by the district. On my first day on the leadership program I was handed 15 current books on educational philosophy and practice and these became the basis of our ongoing discussions. The Director also encouraged the elementary and secondary principals to develop associations and provided the time, a half day each month, and the space at the district office for meetings. He also encouraged and participated in annual retreats that proved to be vital bonding opportunities for principals. As a young principal I not only had the support of my contemporaries, but also that of the “senators,” as we called the older, more experienced principals, who were always available with advice and encouragement. I was lucky that the principal at the closest school to mine was a “senator” who took me under his wing and helped me through some serious challenges such as a lawsuit. It was always reassuring to know that if I had a question, Mike, who had seen it all in 25 years as a principal, had the answers or at least knew where to go to get the answers. As I look back, encouraging and trusting the principals at both levels to take on system-wide issues, such as suggesting policy initiatives, sorting out day-to-day problems, and implementing regional programs, was very clever management and allowed the system to operate with far fewer senior leaders than other districts of similar size. The principals’ associations also provided a pipeline for senior leadership in the system and enabled careful succession plans. Later in my career as a system’s leader, all I needed to do was get the associations behind me to ensure implementation of district or provincial initiatives and mandates for which I was responsible.

As these anecdotes suggest, professional development for professional educators is not just an isolated “quick fix” program now and then, or a series of performance-focused activities, although each may have its place, but rather, professional learning opportunities exist in multiple, diverse, and occasionally in unusual and unexpected situations and contexts throughout one’s career. What I experienced and what I believe all teachers and school leaders require for professional learning to flourish is both time and space, a clear sense of purpose based on student learning, learning opportunities that are appropriate to roles and career stage, and the support and trust from leadership both inside and outside of schools and districts. It is professional learning, not tests, targets, or performance training, that increases students’ learning.

While my examples may be easily dismissed as selective nostalgia from an over-the-hill educator, research by Carrie Leana (2011) and her colleagues demonstrates rather convincingly, “when relationships among teachers in a school are characterized by high trust and frequent interaction – that is social capital is strong – student achievement scores improve (p. 5).” Policies that try to change individual behaviours by hectoring, fear mongering, and reward and punishment strategies have short-term efficacy and virtually no sustainability. Conversely, policies that focus on peer pressure to effect change within organizations and cultures have a far greater chance of long-term success (Rosenberg, 2011). Investments in social capital, not just human capital, have the potential to profoundly change schools and educational systems (Levin, 2010).

Adler and Kwon (2002) provide an all-encompassing definition of social capital when they state that, “social capital is the goodwill available to individuals or groups. Its source lies in the structure and content of the actor’s social relations. Its effects flow from the information, influence, and solidarity it makes available to the actor” (p. 23). They explain that *goodwill* means, the “sympathy, trust and forgiveness others have towards us” (p. 18) and highlights the following qualities of social capital:

- Social capital can substitute for other sources of capital (such as financial)
- Social capital is collective, not located in individuals like human capital
- Does not depreciate with use, it grows and develops with use
- Not amenable to quantifiable measurement
- Needs maintenance, must be renewed and reconfirmed

In spite of context however, it is the individual’s responsibility as a professional educator, regardless of role or employment conditions, to be a continuous career-long learner. I like to think that in my over 50 years as an educator I fit that description. Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan (2012), two educators who have profoundly

influenced my work over the years, have succinctly and eloquently captured the idea of the professional learner. In their view, to teach—and I would add to lead, to consult, and so forth—“is a personal commitment to rigorous training, continuous learning, collegial feedback, respect for evidence, responsiveness to parents, striving for excellence, and going far beyond the requirements of any written contracts” (p. xiv).

Note

1. If you think my metaphor is too “clever by half,” google “deflategate.”

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Commentary

Teachers' Professional Development: A Vital Lever for Change

Megan Webster

ABSTRACT

In this interview, Megan Webster describes key tenets of teachers' professional development. First, it needs to be practice-focused, meaning that the subject is very close to what teachers do every day. Secondly, teachers need to have opportunities to examine expert forms of practice; teachers need models of excellent performance. Finally, teachers must be able to practice and receive feedback in a supportive environment with peers who work in the same subject. This model, described as the "cycle of investigation and enactment," is best implemented in a sustained, long-term way. This model allows teachers to build relationships, develop trust, and commit to improving their teaching practice. She concludes by stating that high-quality professional development for teachers is "one of the greatest levers for change that we have."

Can you talk about your career as an educator to date?

 started as a teacher. I was working at St. George's and I taught for about eight/nine years as a teacher and over that time I did my master's here at McGill. Then I started a service learning program at St. George's where we were connecting kids with community organizations, training community organizations to be ready to receive younger volunteers than they're often used to, and then training parents to accompany the kids. That was an exciting program that I ran for a few years. In my ninth year of teaching I decided to go to school full time to do my PhD. I kept a foot in the door while I did my PhD and now I'm wrapping up my PhD.

How did you get interested in professional development?

I had an extremely positive experience of professional development at St. George's. My experience with PD was that it profoundly impacted my practice and radically changed the way—not just that I taught—but that I thought about the endeavour of teaching, that I thought about what it means to be a teacher, what it means to work with kids. I had such a meaningful experience. It contrasted with what I heard from other educators who felt frustrated with PD, who felt like it wasn't doing anything for them...they were doing it as a compliance activity. I thought, "What is it about this PD that makes it so good and how could we think about scaling up what I experienced?" I initially set out to do my PhD on an investigation of the PD that I had: "What made it so great?" As I began to step into the stream of academic life and I learned more, my interests evolved and deepened and moved in different directions. But that was initially my impetus for getting in the door.

Can you explain what you think are the fundamental principles for professional development, and why?

The key feature of high-quality professional development is that it's focused on practice. By "practice," I mean something that is very close to what teachers do on an everyday basis. "Equity" is a really important idea, but what does it look like in terms of what a teacher is doing in grade eight math tomorrow morning with her unit on triangles? That is complicated for that teacher to negotiate: what does equity look like in that math lesson about triangles? It's really important that PD support people to understand big ideas of high-quality teaching, like ideas around equity or embracing different kinds of learners, or using children's thinking as a resource for the group's thinking via a very concrete practice...but what are you going to do tomorrow and the next day?

The first thing that we need to look at is to make sure that the PD really indicates clearly what the practice is that we want teachers to be working on. Maybe it would be something like orchestrating a whole-group discussion or organizing small groups to work on complex tasks. These are things that teachers do every day or every week. They can get better at doing those things, and in working on those particular things they can work out big ideas about pedagogy. "What does it mean to really think about student thinking...what does it mean to really think about geometry?" That's the first piece, that's it's practice-focused.

The second piece is that teachers need a chance to investigate models of somebody who can do that practice better than them. Watching video representations or watching modelling, or reading text examples of high-quality performance, decomposing that practice, breaking that into smaller pieces and thinking about “what is it exactly that that master teacher was doing, why did the teacher say that at that moment, why did the teacher respond to that comment or not that comment?” and really understand the performance. Then they need to try it out in a situation of reduced complexity with high levels of support.

And it's in the enactment that they get lots of feedback from somebody who's good at it, and it could be a peer as well. And so, they practice it, and they try it out in their classroom, and with somebody to give them support, to give them feedback, maybe coaching while they try it out, and then to come back to the whole group and to iterate the cycle again. Maybe we'll videotape the teacher trying it out and then share that video with the group, analyze it, thinking about, “what could you do to make that even better next time or what do we need to do to tweak the model so that it works really well for your kids?” And either, do the cycle again with a new layer of information or a new level of challenge, or just say, “let's work on something else now.” That cycle is called the “cycle of investigation and enactment,” and I have a lot of confidence that when teachers go through those cycles, that they learn their brains out and their performance improves.

What do you believe is the ideal form of professional development? Can you share an example of this?

That model can be held in lots of different ways. One way that that could be held is in a professional learning community or professional development grants, or some opportunity for teachers to work together with a coach in a sustained long-term way. The cycle of investigation and enactment that I described is pretty complex work that requires teachers to be vulnerable and take risks with each other, and to open up their practice to each other. In the absence of a strong sense of community, that's not likely to happen. Most people are quite private about their practice: they feel insecure about it or they feel like they're going to be judged, or made fun of if they make a mistake.

What happens when you have a long-term group like a professional learning community is that you get a chance to get to know each other, to trust each other, to build relationships, to kind of try something out and have it not work out that great and then have the group say, “I thought it was really interesting. Good for you for trying it out!”

That experience of falling a little bit and being caught by the group, that community feeling, is absolutely integral for people to take the risks that learning entails.

My ideal form, I don't think it needs to be in a particular model. It could be a series of department meetings if the department is well organized. It could be in a series of workshops with an outside provider. I think in general it's nice to have a long-term commitment from a group of people who work together, and ideally that group of people has a very similar practice. [For example], grade eight math teachers or kindergarten through grade two ELA teachers...that the practice is quite similar so that their heads are in the same space. It's also hard for a grade eight math teacher to give meaningful feedback to a kindergarten literacy teacher...the work is so different.

My fantasy professional development situation is a small group of people who work together over time on particular practices, where they're iterating on a small set of focused practices where they're developing community and developing trust. A really nice example of this kind of work in action is a group that I'm working with at St. Thomas high school: they're the math teachers and they teach from grade seven to grade 11. We're working with nine different teachers who all signed up to join a professional development improvement grant—they got the grant and they hired me to orchestrate the work. What we did at the beginning is we talked about, "what is high-quality math instruction?" and we had everybody articulate what they thought are the features of high-quality math instruction.

Then we looked at a video of some high-quality math instruction and said, "what do you think about this, what sticks out to you about this, what makes sense to you about this, what compels you about this, now that we've seen this, does that just change your vision?" And then we added on some more information to the vision. Then we looked at rubrics that have been developed: the instructional quality assessment rubrics for evaluating math instruction. Nobody had ever seen a rubric for teaching before, so it was a little scary as people were maybe self-assessing as they were filling it out. "This is what math educators think high-quality math instruction looks like. What do you think about this?" Then they again refined their vision. At each step the vision is becoming more elaborate and more sophisticated, and they're kind of setting their sights a little bit further and developing more ambitious vision, which I found really exciting. Then we said, "of this list, which of these things really sticks out to you as most interesting or the thing you'd like to zoom in on to work on yourselves?" And they said quite quickly that the thing they all wanted to work on the most was improving their whole-group discussions: how could they get the kids talking to each other about big ideas in math after completing complex tasks? So great, we set that as our vision.

Over the next six sessions what we did is I would offer a little bit of research or a video, or something to get them thinking about the elements of a high-quality whole-group discussion. We began to label different moves of great teachers in whole-group discussions. They started to notice things like what effective teachers do is they allow lots of wait time. They also don't immediately say, "yes, that's the right answer!" because they then shut down the conversation. Or "no, that's not the right answer; what does anybody else think/did anybody get a different answer/how did you figure it out/what other ways could we find to figure out this problem?"

They noticed that their own instruction needed to improve as they began to decompose this practice. So they would set goals for themselves and then they would co-plan a lesson—people who taught the same grade—those two people would go teach the lesson, really working on the whole-group discussion, they would give each other feedback on the whole-group discussion using an evaluation tool that we developed together, and then we'd bring that video to the class. So they'd already been observed, they already talked about it and debriefed it. Then we bring it back to the group at our next session, we watch the video, and we give each other feedback using that same observation grid.

It was extraordinary to me to see how the practice is shifting, with people just getting a little bit of time to work together, to put their heads together, to co-plan, to think about what they're doing, and to act with intention in an area that they hadn't maybe been intentional [in] before. Their practices evolved and [have] gotten so much deeper. One participant said to me, "I don't think math is what I used to think math was"; her ideas have really changed.

We're now in our third year together. Every year we take a different lens: we did a whole-group discussion [and] now we're working on developing complex tasks because they realized if you don't have something juicy to talk about, it's hard to have a good conversation. Every year we take a different slice, and the practice is evolving. More and more people want to join the group. What's happening is that in the math department, people are actually talking to each other about they're doing. In the past they would have planned on their own—now they're co-planning more, they're working on tasks together, they're developing a repertoire of lessons that others are using. It's gone from quite a private practice to quite a public practice. They were strong teachers to begin with. They're a very smart group of hard-working extraordinary teachers, but in the absence of a chance to work together and put their heads together, that structure will limit their capacity for excellence. Using this model that was provided through this grant, they were able to really take their practice to the next level.

The response could be, “well, they had money to have time to do it.” How do you envision doing that without having money? Is that possible?

It’s possible, but it takes a tremendous amount of creativity on the part of the principal and the school leadership team. There is actually a lot of money in schools. There is a lot of money that goes to all sorts of different important places, but when there are a lot of different competing agendas—competing visions, competing ideas about what constitutes high-quality PD—then the money doesn’t always go the same place. In that disbursement you end up often not feeling any improvement or any change because you’ve got one person working on this thing here and one person working over there.

In the end, the school doesn’t get better...you’re not developing a kind of community resources. The costs of this are the minimal cost of my consulting fees and subbing fees for nine teachers for six days a year. That is not a lot of money when you think about how much schools and school boards pay to have, for example, one famous person come for the day and do an inspirational talk...that is much more than the cost of the substitution fees for those days. The first thing that’s important is that we really need a clear vision of what our goals are and to align our resources in that direction. The second thing that we need is to use what is already there better: make more of the resources that currently exist. All teachers and public schools have at least 10 days of professional development days. Those days are hardly ever used for anything but teachers doing “their own thing” like writing their report cards. It’s important that teachers have time to do that, but if they’re professional development days, it’s my idea that at least some of those should be used for professional development.

And if you have a principal with a vision who’s in the same place and can really “dig in” and build something amazing, you could have a theme for five years that you’re working on. Five years times 10 days with teachers is 50 days of professional development...is universe changing...there’s a lot of potential there. Even things like principals arranging to have teachers who teach the same subject in the same grade to have a common period. In the absence of teachers having time in their schedule to collaborate to put their heads together, it’s unlikely that they’re going to. And that’s not rocket science—that’s just the logistics of scheduling. I think that we have really underestimated the potential of our current resources. Obviously, I would love to have more money for PD but I don’t think it’s necessary to really move the practice of teachers in Quebec.

What is your stance on one-time professional development sessions?

My stance is that if all we can get is a one-off, [then] we should take it. We should use every single opportunity that we have to give teachers opportunities to learn and to grow together. I also think that it's hard to do much in a short session. If you don't have teachers that get to work with each other over time, it's hard [for them to] develop the trust that learning entails. There is always potential when you get people together and you give them some protected time. The question is not, "let's throw away all the one-offs," but let's think first of all, "How can we minimize the one-offs and grow the long-term projects?" Think about the one-offs as being series of things. For example, if all the teachers are going to the same six one-offs, why don't we just think of those six things as a series?

Finally, if all we have is a one-off, to say, "what is potentially learnable in a one-off?" There are things that are potentially learnable. One thing that can happen in those sessions is that those could be like "public service announcements" or advertising for more sustained long-term projects. [For example], "I have an hour with teachers. What am I going to do?" "I'm going to tell them about what they can do with the PDIG [Professional Development and Innovation Grant]. This is the PDIG model. Here is the application form. I'll help you fill it out." I'm using that hour to mobilize PD that I think might work.

Another thing that can happen there is that you can think about it as an opportunity for networking. It is very important for teachers to get to know each other and to build communities and networks across schools and school boards. If your goal is to connect teachers, you can have a session that's like speed-dating for English teachers...and they can share a unit that you developed and trade e-mail addresses if you want to get in touch with each other...just as a premise of getting people to connect with each other.

Finally, the other thing you can do with a one-off is think about it as "it's not going to teach teachers how to radically improve their practices...it's not going to change school life...it's not going to improve instruction in a significant way," but sometimes a one-off has the potential to tweak a practice. Tweaking is important. If we're constantly tweaking, over time we might get a little bit better. So we'll take that opportunity to tweak. That would mean teachers can learn something that doesn't require a change in an epistemic stance. As long as it doesn't require them to radically reimagine what they think of as teaching or learning or knowledge, or thinking. An example of something might be, "you keep your grades in a grade book by hand, [which] takes a lot of time. You could keep your grade book online using this program. Here you go!"

If a teacher is not assessing their students accurately, if their judgments aren't sound, this is not going to be improving their practice. But it's a tiny tweak that might save them a couple of hours a semester—that couple of hours a semester might be exactly what they need to go to the gym and feel healthier, happier, and more grounded, and that might lead them to eventually seek professional development on developing more sound judgments about their students' thinking and learning. It's not optimal, but there is potential.

A concern about professional development is that when there is no enticement or it's not mandated, educators who might benefit most from professional development do not seek it. How do you think all educators might become seekers of PD?

The question that you're asking gets to a theory of change at scale: "How do we move entire organizations in a different direction?" And what often happens is that if we think about the normal curve...we've got a couple of teachers who are really struggling and they're killing the mood in the school, and their kids are frustrated with them. Most of your teachers are pretty competent, most of your teachers are doing a pretty good job; everything is great. And then you've got a few teachers who are serious leaders, who are setting a positive tone and they are making schools exciting, wonderful places for kids to learn and grow. Often what happens is that PD targets the teachers who are most struggling: "You guys are bringing us down. We want to give you intensive forms of support so that you will stop taking so much attention and giving me so many parent calls, and so on." What happens is that often you make serious investments with these teachers and they grow very little. Or you set up PD for them and they don't choose it.

Principals, in particular, have this experience of spending energy and resources on teachers who are not learning, and they become discouraged and sort of pull off from PD because there's no motivation to do that any more. I encourage principals to actually put those teachers aside in their mind for a little while and think about these teachers at the top end of the curve—those teachers that with a very modest investment of professional resources of time [and] energy will grow tremendously because they want it, they're not struggling with will. So what happens is that they will grow and they will support the teachers who are doing pretty well. [For example], your department leaders or your social leaders, the people who sort of set the tone—invest in them, and they will shift what's considered normal to improve.

That's the goal. You water the flowers, not the stones, and what happens is that these stones find themselves so far way from what the rest of the school is doing, that they either step it up a notch and say, "I want to get on board. It seems like everybody is in a PLC. I'm starting to feel left out. Maybe I should join a PLC too." It's the social pressure that gets them to move—the light, not the fire, so to speak—and they step up their performance, or they say, "You know what, I really don't fit in in this community any more. Maybe teaching isn't for me. Maybe I should retire. Maybe I should look into a different career." [Any of those realizations] are totally fine and totally appropriate.

If you make your initial investments with the teachers who are willing, passionate, excited and you set them up to mentor somebody else in the department that they really like working with, then what happens is you shift what's normal, you put tension on the lower end of performance and those people step up or step out. That is my theory of change in organizations. It's the easiest way to move an organization. It's the most efficient way to move an organization. It's also the one that feels the best because principals are making investments and they're seeing improvements, which motivates them to work harder to make more investments. And the positive cycle of energy builds, rather than feeling like, "I'm doing all this work and nothing is happening." So let's just not do the work that doesn't feel good and we'll take the path of least resistance, which actually is the most effective path.

In closing, how would like to wrap this session up?

If we figure out how to lead high-quality professional development for teachers, our schools will become radically different places. So much attention goes on thinking about the kids' thinking, but we really need to invest in supporting the teachers' thinking. Because if the teachers are learning and growing, their kids will be learning and growing. And if we improve the learning opportunities for teachers, our kids will do better in school and our society as a whole will improve. I'm absolutely convinced that professional development is one of the greatest levers for social change that we have.



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Con Aprecio / With Appreciation: Pushing Beyond the Boundaries of Possibility in Educational Professional Development

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ABSTRACT

The need for relevant, continuous, and restorative professional development is evident at all levels of teacher education. As teachers teaching teachers and educators educating educators, we aspire to implement meaningful, sustaining, learning experiences that make a difference in the lives of children, families, educators, and communities. This reflective testimony calls us to consider the funds of knowledge and example of our colleagues in the tireless quest to embody and enact civil rights law, and move beyond the boundaries of possibility in educational professional development to actualize educational equity and social justice.

As a professor anxiously awaiting the modifications to and reauthorization of the United States' Elementary and Secondary Education Act (2002), I spend a lot of time thinking about the role of professional development in the lives of my teacher education students and public school colleagues. The need for ethical, intelligent, and relevant professional development is especially important for administrators in higher education who are insulated from the realities of economic insecurity, K-12 classrooms, and the tenure process. As teachers teaching teachers and educators educating educators in positions of power and privilege, it is our obligation to implement meaningful, sustaining, learning experiences that will ultimately make a difference in the lives of children, families, teachers, and communities. However, when I reflect on the value and impact of the various meetings, classes, workshops, trainings, sessions, seminars, retreats, conferences, graduate degree programs I have attended

across my professional career, I return full circle to a basic truth: Everything I needed to know, I learned from my bilingual teaching assistant.

When I first noticed Aleta in the hallway of our elementary school, she was indistinguishable from the kids. Like her indigenous ancestors, she stood at a slim, yet compact, five feet tall. Balancing a tub of manipulatives against her right hip, Aleta's most identifiable characteristic was the river of dark chocolate hair that extended past her torso. She would sometimes braid it into a plait that cascaded and bobbed down her back, calling attention to the tiny gold earrings that delicately framed her café-con-leche complexion.

Aleta was a natural beauty without knowing it; below the curl of her bangs, her thoughtful, doe-like eyes wisely took in her surroundings. Most the time, she wore her tresses on top of her head, swept swiftly from her waist in a single movement to be expertly secured in place with the dart of a pin and a raised eyebrow. When we first worked together in the American Southwest during my late twenties, she was chronologically 10 years my younger, yet already my senior and mentor. A portrait of the tireless pursuit of civil rights law, Ms. Aleta Nuñez' pushed me to develop myself, our students, and many others to move beyond the boundaries of possibility in educational professional development to actualize educational equity and social justice.

The squared edges of the plaque poked through the white tissue paper. As she handed it to me, she said to open it later. She knew I would cry, and it was not her way to have an emotional goodbye. In fact, I don't think we ever acknowledged I was leaving for doctoral studies. Later, when I opened her present in the shadow of the mountain, I choked back the tears. The words on the wall hanging read: "Con aprecio. Tu me has conmovido. Yo he crecido." In the eight years we had worked together, she had never given me a material gift; her family was trying to save enough money for a house to raise their children in on the pittance she earned. The words on the plastic wall plaque captured my heart, for until that moment, I hadn't really known what I had meant to her. They read: With appreciation. You have motivated/moved/inspired me, and I have grown.

Aleta was born in 1973 on a January day when the snows on the mountain glitter against the sky. She took her place in a long line of pioneers who transcended geographic, sociocultural, and ideological borders, to represent the best of the human spirit. Like many Norteños who traveled the roads of Aztlán, her *antepasados* migrated back to where the mighty Colorado runs red in canyons, never losing touch with their Mexican homelands (Rosales, 1996).

True to their Spanish heritage, Aleta's ancestors taught the *Americanos* how to be cowboys when rural Chihuahua burned dry in the summer sun. By the 1950s, the *Nuñez* menfolk had earned a reputation for skilled work and dependability among Anglo farmers, miners, and ranchers in a tiny mountain town, settling as the first Latino family among 400 residents. At a time when Hispanics were denied access to local institutions and businesses, *los Nuñez* drew on their internal resources, establishing their home among cottonwood trees (Rosales, 1996).

Aleta's father came of age during the 60s when hippies and celebrities discovered the recreational possibilities of the region. Like his *padre* and his father's father before him, Juan was a ranch hand with a quick wit. His good looks, *modales perfectos*, and honest speech rendered him a serious candidate for marriage. His bride Veronica, *la mitad de su naranja*, a graceful and warm woman, would intelligently and humbly raise his three brown-eyed children. As the 60s turned into the 70s, their immaculate home was accompanied by the trailers of other relatives and *paisanos* who could not make a decent living in the *cuidades perdidas* or Mexican hinterlands (Rosales, 1996).

As the farms and mines shut down, the extended *Nuñez* family and their neighbors joined the growing number of immigrants building and cleaning resort homes for an influx of celebrities and wealthy business owners. In time, their pastoral community would be eclipsed by a dramatic and enduring economic shift from an agricultural to a tourist industry. Without a solid academic education in the English language, increasing numbers of Spanish-speaking *braceros* and service workers were forced to compete with the hippies-turned-yuppies and seasonal workers brought in by multimillion-dollar ski corporations. The rise of technology in the 1990s would give license to a land grab among the super-rich, real estate agents, and lawyers, resulting in a temporary building boom, exorbitant housing prices, and the whole-scale relocation of working-class families downriver, with significant impacts on the *Nuñez* and their neighbors.

Shortly before Aleta's birth, the U.S. Office of Civil Rights in Washington D.C. issued a memo to public school administrators in her state reminding them that Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed discrimination and the denial of academic services to students² on the basis of race, color, or national origin (Crawford, 2004). The 1970 memorandum was followed by Title IX (1972), ensuring gender equity in every educational program receiving federal funding. These affirmative steps, and the Supreme Court's ruling in *Lau vs. Nichols* (1974) obligating all American schools to implement the instructional means to learn English, were ignored by the district in the developing mountain valley.

When Aleta turned one and a half, the future of the *Nuñez* family was changed by the stroke of a presidential pen signing the Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA) in 1974. Across the United States, school desegregation had been largely unsuccessful. Standing on the 14th Amendment, the EEOA (1974) irrefutably entitled all public school students to an “equal educational opportunity without regard to race, color, sex, or national origin,” establishing the standard for school placements to be the most appropriate neighborhood school. The law also outlawed discrimination against school staff and faculty members, including para-educators, teacher assistants, teachers, and administrators. Schools that exhibited a “failure ...to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs” were explicitly breaking federal law.

For the first time in U.S. history, Aleta and other linguistically and culturally diverse children had the legal right to attend the same schools as their European-American, English-speaking counterparts (Donato, 1997; Ruiz, 1997). Children who previously traveled extended distances to attend school could enroll within a few blocks or miles of their homes. Principals and teachers were prohibited from mis-educating or harassing students by placing them in unsuitable classrooms, grade levels, or instructional programs. Passage of the EEOA (1974) ensured academic language support so non-native English learners might understand their teachers and access the curriculum (Crawford, 2004). The law also meant Juan and Veronica could send their three children to school and expect them to be treated with respect.

When Aleta began kindergarten in 1978, Veronica would brush her daughter’s long hair, preparing her *hija* for the coming day. With each soothing stroke, mother and child would problem-solve about the decisions Aleta would make and behavior she would choose as a representative of the family name. Her *mama* would tell her that *la familia* depended on her to bring English home from school. She carried her parents’ strong sense of morality, initiative, and tenacity into the classroom. Teachers described Aleta as an eager, curious, and focused student, who rarely missed a day of class. A thoroughness and efficiency characterized her actions. At home, she ironed perfect creases into her father’s and brother’s cotton shirts, once explaining that a real *Mexicana* would never allow her menfolk to wear anything but perfectly pressed shirts. At school, Aleta steadfastly persevered to master literacy and numeracy in her second language, while acquiring reading and writing proficiencies in Spanish at home. Without Title IX, she could not have developed the same fierce intelligence, strategy, and determination on the basketball court and soccer field. Aleta grew into a serious, stunning young woman, who communicated through a thousand calibrated smiles that revealed a horizon of ivory teeth.

When Aleta dropped out of school at 16 to get married and start a family, her teachers and a principal parked under the cottonwood tree, rapped on the door to the trailer, and convinced her inside the small living room to finish her studies. In 1990, she graduated at the age of 17, just before her first child was born. The greatest riches of her life continued to be found in the arms of family. Her husband was a mechanic who could fix anything. One day on the job, a piece of equipment became stuck in the earth and Pedro was permanently disabled while trying to remove it under his supervisor's orders. When the employer contested his claim for Workman's Compensation, his paycheck, body, and career were unjustly sacrificed for a bracero only in his 20s. After the accident, Aleta's family relied solely on the income generated from her many talents. Carolín, their eldest, loved to follow her mom around and play silly word games that became more sophisticated as she grew older; by the time Junior was four, he could name every dinosaur in Spanish, English, and Latin. Mechita and Priscilla would come later, all beautiful, vibrant, intelligent children, bringing their mother great pride in equal and yet diverse ways, grown in the sunlight of love with high expectations.

In 1990, Aleta also began her teaching career as a bilingual education assistant during which I was privileged to learn from her for eight years. Carolín's birth motivated Aleta's transition into college, whereby she immediately began working on a Bachelor's degree in Education. Slowly, steadily, mindfully, she whittled away at her coursework. We teamed together sharing first and second grade English as an Additional Language students, and co-taught in our Spanish-English, dual immersion, fourth and fifth grade classrooms. We exulted in our students' successes, struggled against their hardships, grieved their losses, and breathed in with satisfaction their many accomplishments as *comadres*. Laughter bound our respect for each other. My bilingual assistant taught me how to be a teacher.

The pencil Aleta poked into her bun while teaching a morning reading group would be pulled out as a pick-axe at lunch to chip away at her homework. After her children and husband went to bed, she would fall asleep over her textbooks. One summer, we enrolled in a graduate course with a well-known bilingual education researcher. A fellow Latina, she threw Aleta out of her class in the first 10 minutes for not yet completing a Bachelor's degree. We exited her classroom together in disgust.

Undeterred, purposefully, and successfully, Aleta earned her B.A. and initial teaching certification as well as a Master's degree, serving the profession for 22 years as a teacher's aide, an elementary classroom teacher, a high school Spanish and EAL educator, a soccer coach, and an EAL and General Education Diploma (GED) community college professor. In a reversal from early conversations, she took on the role of surrogate mother for her

own students, both inside and outside the classroom, challenging them to never forget their Spanish or be ashamed of where they were born. Aleta carried the same powerful message as a founding member of a group of diversity trainers, seeking to cultivate student agency and leadership within diversity-responsive school networks, to combat prejudice and other forms of violence.

Aleta's commitment to the greater good of *all* children, Hispanic and Anglo, was unswerving. She advocated for their healthy growth and development, envisioning school as a safe, happy, and just harbor. In 1990, the number of Spanish speakers in our community had increased dramatically—and would continue to do so well after my departure—until EALLs comprised over 60% of the students enrolled today. If the Civil Rights Act (1964), Title IX (1972), and the EEOA (1974) shaped Aleta's destiny, the measures outlined in *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981) would define both her professional practice and advocacy efforts: our school and district were portraits of non-compliance, and Aleta labored—often at great personal expense—with a small group of allies to effectively implement “English language services or programs” “based on sound educational theory” to children legally entitled to them.

According to the ruling, American school districts could not place English language learners in the back of a classroom and expect them to passively learn the language by osmosis (Crawford, 2004). In company with all other U.S. schools, districts became/were/are required to *legally* identify non-native English speaking students when enrolling children. The tiny audio-visual storage and stifling pipe closet where Aleta exclusively taught Latino/Chicano–American citizens and Mexican national students could no longer / cannot be designated as an appropriate or safe instructional space. After the *Castaneda* (1981) ruling, materials and resources needed/need to be ordered to actually implement a curriculum. Our district, and all other American schools, was/were/are responsible for hiring sufficient numbers of qualified faculty whose responsibilities included/include monitoring program effectiveness. Students could not / cannot be exited too early or too late from English as an Additional programs and never without parental consent. The law required/requires oral interpretation and written translation—at the expense of the district and not the families—to inform parents and caregivers about important school information including report cards and other documents. EALLs could not / cannot be denied access to special education testing in their native language or services including gifted and talented programs.

While she would never admit it, Aleta was perfectly posed for advocacy. She was a living example of the Spanish word for “educación”; her demeanor and comportment were always wise, considerate, and gracious. She was polite to everyone and would

work with and learn from them if she could. But Aleta didn't owe anyone anything; her loyalties were aligned with civil rights and educational law and, ultimately, what was best for a child's future development. Consequently, her respect needed to be won and maintained. On occasion, she forced me to confront my own professional incompetencies, terrors, and oversights when, as an emerging Spanish speaker, I was afraid to miscommunicate with parents on the phone. Her intentions were never to humiliate or hang anyone out to dry, but she held high expectations for everyone to continue to develop professionally.

Once admitted into Aleta's circle of trust, a witty observation or simple statement of truth instantly lit up her bright, intelligent eyes like a sudden sunburst on a windy day. She was generous with praise or support when warranted or needed. She ignored her exclusion from co-workers' parties, weddings, and baby showers, and disregarded chatter about inexpensive vacations to Acapulco. She was the friend I called when colleagues were cruel, and the sister I didn't have going through the death of my mother and brother. When her own happiness was confronted by existential dilemmas, Aleta's ultimate solution was to apply the common denominator of unity. This value sometimes resulted in loneliness and suffering, but Aleta walked with a clear mind and heart in accordance with her principles.

Looking back, I see Aleta taught me things that are reflected in my everyday life and professional practice some 20 years later. She taught me to place the avocado pit into the bowl to keep guacamole from turning brown. To salt the egg pan from breakfast so the kitchen won't smell like sulfur after work. To *always* wait for mothers who were late to conferences in case they were on foot and always taste dishcloth-wrapped *tortillas* directly in front of the gift-giver. When writing letters home to parents/caretakers, Aleta advised to use "estimado" instead of "querido," unless I wanted to provoke all kinds of curiosity or drama. She taught me to smile before November because the complexities of emotion and scourge of racism can ravel the braid of language and content acquisition. Aleta wisely pointed out that learning can only take place when it is gently pushed beyond boundaries that exist within a compassionate relationship secured by high expectations.

She educated me about the lives and histories of the children we taught, insisting that although families may be challenged by poverty, their days were abundant. Aleta noted that the wealthy weren't necessarily rich, nor the privileged favored. She ascertained being thirsty for kindness was a form of drought. She demonstrated that the greatest gifts a teacher could deliver were lessons in confidence and edified that social justice is achieved on a daily basis in our everyday engagements with each

other. Aleta rarely uttered *dichos* out loud; instead, she lived her practice fully, clearly, and comprehensively with grace, optimism, and pride.

Pushing beyond the boundaries of possibility in educational professional development, as Aleta so aptly espoused, is especially important at this moment in history for several reasons. First, as American legislators seek to replace the ESEA's "No Child Left Behind Act" (NCLB) (2002) with the "Every Student Succeeds Act," how can we truly prepare *all of our children* for a future without cultivating and extending our diverse and collective sociolinguistic heritages? The outgoing law *completely* cut out earlier renditions of the bill funding multilingualism and bilingual education. In a sweep of educational rhetoric, NCLB (2002) eradicated the biliterate, academic needs of *all* American K-12 students, while jeopardizing the United States' global standing within diplomatic, academic, scientific, business, and cultural circles. Without the mindful, systemic, and systematic cultivation of linguistic expertise beginning in kindergarten, we tongue-tie and restrict our abilities to individually, communally, and collectively address the societal problems that threaten us. Will American legislators have the foresight to pass a law that places the 21st century proficiencies of multilingualism and biliteracy within the reach of all children as future global citizens?

Second, one out of every five children in the United States is currently growing up in poverty, with children representing the poorest demographic in the country (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2015). These students represent over 51% of all children enrolled in American public schools, with English Language Learners comprising over 40% of this same demographic (NCES, 2014). As biliterate potentials, EALLs are not only national resources, but also prospective treasures. Despite the codification of equal educational opportunity based on sex, race, and national origin, issues of academic inequities persist, especially with respect to gender, socioeconomic status, and language. By federal law, *all children* in the United States warrant an equal, equitable, and enriched education. As Aleta's family history attests, these codes are living, breathing forces impacting our daily lives and collective futures. Will American legislators have the foresight to pass a law that authentically challenges or combats circumstantial and intergenerational poverty?

Third, NCLB (2002), like other legislation of its time, banished common sense, scientific research, and democratic values from classrooms, flinging public school doors open to private enterprise and personal profit. While other markets faltered, the corporate hijacking of the curriculum instituted a sorting system dependent on digital access and linguistic competencies. The engorgement of Big Media, through the computer and testing industries, have not only left children behind, but also

banished them from standing at the gate. Will American legislators have the foresight to pass a law that protects the learning spaces of children from exploitative and predatory businesses?

To push beyond the boundaries of possibility in educational professional development, we must stop and reverse such intellectual, cultural, and creative losses—far more serious than the GDP—to re-implement a linguistically and developmentally appropriate vision of childhood. Pushing beyond the boundaries of possibility in educational professional development actively rejects the colonization of privilege through corporate standards that fly in the face of mindfully developed bodies of thought based on scientific evidence. It demands that we rescue schooling from congressional and legislative committees devoted to big business and the defense industry, by placing a free, equal, and enriched education back between the national pillars of health and human welfare where it once resided (Crawford, 2004)

Pushing beyond the boundaries of possibility in educational professional development obligates us to hold accountable those educators and policy makers whose daily complicity or weak compromises place them morally, ethically, or legally above the law. It solicits us to restructure and retool programs that are equally good for the rich and the poor, without placing the expense onto indigenous, dual-language, transnational, or refugee learners. Pushing beyond the boundaries of possibility in educational professional development demands that we re-conceptualize schooling and teacher education as the opportunity to co-create critical, creative, and linguistically rich pedagogies that engender sustainability with the expertise of our community partners. In order to achieve these goals, we must move beyond false professional development experiences that allege to present the real-life narratives and perspectives of individuals who have been marginalized from the protection and pretension of academic bubbles. We must dignify the contributions of our bilingual teaching assistants and students while consciously and actively respecting and advocating on behalf of their real-life experiences, linguistic expertise, and occupational potential. *Nuestras comadres* would call it love with high expectations.

Aleta was diagnosed with kidney cancer in 2012, an injustice for a woman who had never smoked a cigarette or drank alcohol. Her students and staff shaved their heads, raising money for her treatment; a former principal donated a plethora of sick days so she wouldn't lose her job in between surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation. But the cancer spread to Aleta's lungs. She tried experimental drugs without success. When I flew in to see her at Thanksgiving, her wise eyes still shone. She dragged her oxygen line from the bedroom to the kitchen table, so we could sit and talk awhile.

She unconsciously ran her hand back and forth over her bald head. “Are you afraid?” I asked. Her chin moved from right to left and then back again. “I’m not afraid for myself,” she replied. “But I fear for my kids,” and, very quickly, turned it away.

Aleta died in 2013 on a December day when the snows on the mountain glittered against the sky. She was 40 years old. She is survived by her grandmother, both her parents, a sister and a brother, her four children, two grandbabies, and her many aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews, nieces, students, and colleagues. She was buried on the side of the mountain overlooking the valley and the tiny square schools and soccer fields where her chocolate braid bobbed down her back as she ran. For the last 20 years, her plaque has hung in my many offices, strategically placed as a reminder for me to develop professionally every single day, sending out its simple, elegant, and reciprocal message:

The squared edges of the card poked through the white envelope. As I handed it to her, I said to open it later. I knew she would cry, and it was not her way to have an emotional goodbye. This time, we both knew she would be leaving, for the cancer had spread to her brain. “We love you, Cata,” affirmed her mother in Spanish as the family walked me to the living room door. A few minutes later, I pulled over, faced the mountain, and choked back the tears. She would read that she had captured my heart and had meant the world to me: “With appreciation. You have motivated/moved/inspired me, and I have grown.

Let us do right by Aleta and all our children. May Americans love and hold their legislators to high expectations. Together, we must push beyond the boundaries of possibility in professional development to actualize educational equity and social justice.

Notes

1. A pseudonym: The author wishes to thank Aleta’s family for permission to publish its history.
2. For more information about the civil and educational rights of linguistically diverse students and their teachers in the United States, see the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights at: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html>

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The Promise of Action Research: Lessons Learned From the Indiana Principal Leadership Institute

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to describe a professional development program for principals focused on their engagement in action research, the systematic and intentional study by principals of their own administrative practice. The program is described in detail along with a brief analysis of the action research produced by the principals, a report of the principals' perceptions of the action research experience from survey data, and the authors' reflections on important considerations to take into account when designing a long-term program of principal professional development that endeavors to develop principals as action researchers.

In recent years, there has been increased attention to determining the factors that constitute powerful professional development for teachers and the ways these factors translate into effective models of professional development (Desimone, 2009; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). While we have learned a great deal about teacher development from these studies and efforts, it is important to note that principals, no less than teachers, need effective models of professional development as well. Mitgang and Gill (2012) call attention to the importance of ongoing support for principal development: "Getting pre-service principal training right is essential. But equally important is the training and support school leadership receive after they're hired" (p. 20). Why is this so important? Study after study documents the significant impact principals have on student achievement

(e.g., Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). In a 2010 Wallace Foundation Report, *Education Leadership: An Agenda for School Improvement*, DeVita says, “The bottom line is that investments in good principals are a particularly cost-effective way to improve teaching and learning” (p. 3).

Yet, professional development for principals has been described as a “wasteland” (Barth, 2001). According to the National Association of Secondary School Principals and National Association of Elementary School Principals report entitled *Leadership Matters: What the Research Says About the Importance of Principal Leadership* (2013), while some principals have access to meaningful professional development opportunities that provide a well-developed system of support for them as they enact their work as administrators, “others still have to fly by the seat of their pants and feel that the culture is unsupportive” (p. 10).

To help address the many principals who remain unsupported without access to professional development opportunities, recommendations for principal professional development programs have consistently appeared in the literature for the past two decades. For example, the Educational Research Service’s (1999) publication *Professional Development for School Principals* states that, “effective staff development for administrators is long-term, planned, and job-embedded; focuses on student achievement; supports reflective practice; and provides opportunities to work, discuss, and solve problems with peers” (p. 8.3). The Interstate Licensure Consortium made similar recommendations in 2000, in a text entitled, *Proposition for Quality Professional Development of School Leaders*, and updated these recommendations again in 2008. More recently, Hitt, Tucker, and Young (2012) described the importance of professional development efforts for principals at all levels of experience as focusing on “reflection, growth, and renewal” (p. 11).

Keeping the recommendations made by these reports and other publications on the professional development of principals published over time in mind, the P-12 faculty in the department of Educational Leadership at Indiana State University designed an intensive professional development program for practicing principals. The department received funding from the Indiana Legislature to develop the two-year program, entitled “Indiana Principal Leadership Institute” (IPLI). IPLI seeks to “provide building-level principals with the skills and tools needed to increase their personal leadership capacities, as well as to increase the learning capacities of their schools” (<http://www.indianapli.org/>). To increase both the personal leadership capacity of principals as well as the learning capacity of their schools, one core feature of IPLI professional development programming is engaging administrators in action research.

Many exemplary leadership development programs utilize action research as a component of the overall professional development of school principals (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007). Adopted from the work on teacher/action research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Noffke, 1997; Somekh & Zeichner, 2009; Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014; Dana, 2013), principal action research refers to the process of a principal engaging in systematic, intentional study of his/her own administrative practice and taking action for change based on what he/she learns as a result of the inquiry (Dana, Tricarico, & Quinn, 2010; Dana, Thomas, & Boynton, 2011; Dana, 2009). Inquiring principals begin the process of action research by defining a research question or “wondering” that is based on a current dilemma, problem, issue, or tension they face as an administrator. Next, they develop a plan to gain insights into their question through the collection and analysis of multiple forms of data. Data can include, but is not limited to, the following: classroom walk-through notes, field notes, anecdotal notes, student work, teacher lesson plans, journals kept by the administrator, interviews, surveys, documents produced by the school, student performance on tests and other assessment measures, and literature related to the topic of their study. After data analysis, principals share their learning with others and take action for change based on their learning and begin the action research cycle again.

While IPLI is just entering the third year of its work, the process of action research has shown great promise as one mechanism to create powerful professional learning opportunities for principals that address the recommendations made in the literature. The purpose of this article is to describe the ways action research has been incorporated into IPLI and lessons learned by the authors in the implementation of this model of principal professional learning over time. We begin with a brief overview of the history and structure of IPLI, followed by a detailed description of the ways action research was incorporated into it with a particular focus on the ways action research was introduced and experienced by the principals during their first year of participation in the program. Next, we share a brief analysis of the action research produced by the principals and report on their perceptions of the AR experience from survey data collected on the principals’ overall satisfaction with IPLI. Finally, we end this article with our reflections on important considerations to take into account when designing a long-term program of principal professional development that endeavors to develop principals as action researchers.

Overview of the Indiana Principal Leadership Institute

Created by the Indiana General Assembly in 2013, IPLI represents a bipartisan effort to strengthen education in Indiana by focusing on how to better prepare and support principals to lead in their schools and their communities. The Department of Educational Leadership at Indiana State University partnered with the Indiana Association of School Principals to establish the two-year institute.

The conceptual framework for the model used to guide this institute is grounded in theory from the literature related to leadership capacity and learning organizations, and is diagrammed in Figure 1. Reflecting the mission of IPLI, the diagram represents the ways action research helps principals build their own personal leadership capacity as well as their school's learning capacity over a two-year timeframe that is characterized by principals' attendance at a series of meetings on a monthly basis. The meetings consist of two different types: whole-group seminars where every principal in the program meets together in one location for an entire day, and regional-cohort focus group meetings that consist of small groups of four to six principals whose schools are located in close geographic proximity to one another. These groups meet in a location of their choice for one half day on an alternating basis with the whole-group seminars and are led by a trained mentor.

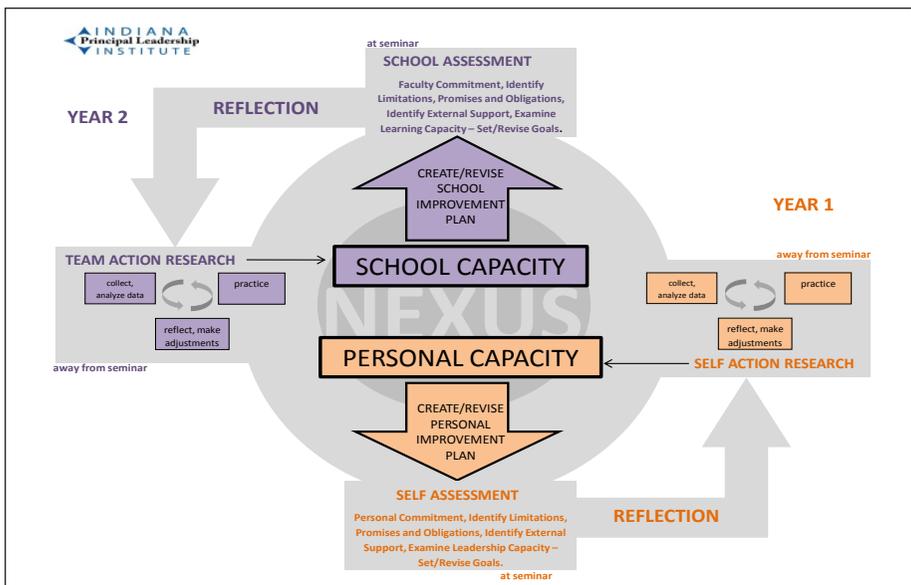


Fig. 1: IPLI conceptual framework

IPLI believes it is powerful when leaders, who share the same issues, can meet face to face and share their stories. The alternation of whole-group and smaller group meetings enables program participants to gain a sense of trust as they become more willing to share their experiences and welcome critique from peers. Each whole-group meeting consists of presentations by nationally recognized speakers on timely topics critical to the principalship, reflection on assessment data collected for each principal by IPLI, and time in regional cohort groups to plan and implement an action research study. Each small-group regional cohort meeting also consists of activities and discussion about each principal's action research as it unfolds throughout the year, as well as time to process and make sense of new information presented at whole-group seminars and time to function as a support group for one another.

Each year, approximately 50 principals, nominated by a district-level supervisor, are selected to participate. Preference is given to principals with three or more years of experience, and every effort is made to ensure that the state is represented geographically, demographically, and academically (A-F school rating).¹ Once selected, principals are divided into regional focus-cohorts and assigned a mentor.

Individuals interested in being an IPLI mentor must be nominated and are then chosen by a selection committee, through an extensive review process. IPLI mentors, consisting mainly of current practicing principals as well as some superintendents who have demonstrated excellence in school leadership, receive training, which includes specific preparation on how to coach the action research process. Once a month support is also provided for the mentors to scaffold their coaching of the action research process in the form of a newsletter with tips and ideas for facilitating action research at each regional cohort meeting as well as readings and other materials to support coaching (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2008; Dana, 2013). Mentors reported that this support enabled them to effectively coach and minimized any struggles they had in enacting their role as mentor.

As previously stated, mentors meet monthly with their regional focus-cohorts and also conduct at least two site visits to each principal's school during the year. The role of the mentor is critical, and IPLI expects mentors to create, develop, and maintain an effective, professional mentoring relationship with IPLI principals. In addition, mentors are expected to facilitate meaningful conversations, ask the tough questions, and support each principal at and away from the seminars. As information is shared either by guest speakers or through other venues at seminars, mentors are required to help principals process that information into meaningful and usable knowledge.

In addition to the whole-group seminars and regional focus-cohort groups led by a mentor, participation in IPLI includes access to IPLI resources to support the needs of principals and their schools; involvement in the Marzano High Reliability Schools™ Network; membership in the Indiana Association of School Principals; registration for the Indiana Association of School Principals Fall Conference; registration for the Ed Leaders Network, an Internet-based, on-demand professional development for school leaders²; an opportunity to enroll in 12 university credits toward the Indiana State University Educational Specialist's program at a significantly reduced tuition rate; and 45 Professional Growth Plan (PGP) points for state licensure renewal for each year of participation. In addition, during the second year of the program, IPLI supports the attendance of two teachers for each principal at every whole-group seminar. In this way, teachers become action research partners with their principals during year two of the program, which focuses on whole-school improvement. In contrast, during year one, principals focus their action research on their own personal leadership development. It is this initial action research experience that is the focus of this article.

In April of 2015, IPLI graduated its first cohort of 56 principals and 11 mentors. Cohort 2, consisting of 57 principals and 13 mentors, has begun its second year with over 100 teachers participating in the whole-group seminars with their principals. On July 14, 2015, IPLI welcomed its third cohort of 62 principals and 11 mentors. This article reports on the year one action research experiences of Cohort 2 principals, as it was not until year two of IPLI that the IPLI action research model was fully developed and implemented.

The IPLI Action Research Model: Year One

Year one action research experiences for IPLI principals begin with a two-day July institute on the Indiana State University campus. The institute includes an introduction to and overview of IPLI, time for regional cohort members to meet their mentors and to engage in activities that begin the development of strong relationships with one another, two to three nationally known speaker keynotes and time to debrief what they learned in each session, interaction with the previous IPLI principal cohort, and an extensive action research kickoff. The kickoff begins with a two-hour interactive introductory session that includes a presentation explaining the foundations and value of the process, an overview of each phase of action research (developing a wondering or research question, collecting data, analyzing data, taking action, and sharing one's learning with others), and extensive examples of action research completed by teachers

and principals both locally and across the nation. This action research introductory session takes place on the first day of the institute.

On the second day, principals from the previous cohort present their action research in a conference-like format, enabling the new first-year IPLI principals to choose two specific examples of action research to learn about that were completed within the IPLI professional development program. Next, the new principals are introduced to the IPLI action research mini-cycle, designed to help the principals develop an initial “feel” for the process and the meaning it could have for their practice. The IPLI action research mini-cycle consists of five options, each requiring approximately 60–90 minutes of a principal’s time prior to the next whole-group seminar in September. The topics cover the value of Twitter, webinars, and literature for a principal’s practice, as well as time and stress management. Each option is presented using the language of action research: wondering, action, data collection, data analysis.

To exemplify, the first two options for the IPLI action research mini-cycle appear below:

SAMPLE AR MINI-CYCLE OPTIONS

Option One: Twitter as a Learning Tool for Principals. Follow 3-5 educational leaders between now and the September seminar. Keep a brief log of their tweets and what they make you think about in relationship to your own instructional leadership practice as a principal. Their tweets become your “data” to answer the question, “In what ways can following distinguished educators on Twitter inform my practice as an instructional leader at my school?” Bring your log with you to our September seminar and be ready to “analyze” this data; share who you followed and what you learned with your cohort members.

Option Two: The Value of Webinars for Administrative Practice. Watch webinars on Ed Leaders Network (most of these are 10-15 minutes in length) to learn more about topics of interest to you. Watch a total of 3-5 Webinars (approximately one a week over time) between now and the September seminar. Keep a journal to track your learning from these webinars. After each webinar viewed, complete a short journal entry using these prompts: “In what way did this webinar impact my learning as a principal?,” and “What, if anything, might I do in my school as a result of watching this webinar?” These journal entries become your “data” to answer the question, “What is the relationship between my participation in short 10-15 minute webinars approximately once a week and my administrative

practice?” Bring your journal with you to our September meeting and be ready to “analyze” this data and share the webinars you watched and what you learned as a result with your cohort members.

At the July meeting, throughout all of the activities named above, principals sit in their regional cohort groups and time is built in throughout the institute for mentors and principals to begin to develop positive working relationships with one another. One activity completed by each regional cohort group is called “Forming Ground Rules,”³ where each group creates norms for its work together. One important norm developed and adopted by each group focuses on confidentiality—what happens in the group discussion stays in the group discussion to ensure principals can freely share their dilemmas, issues, and tensions of practice that lead to their action research without fear their honest exploration of their practice will be reported to their supervisors back in the home district. Ground rules are reviewed at the start of each regional cohort meeting throughout the year.

At the August regional cohort group meeting, mentors check in with their principals on AR mini-cycle option choices and progress made to date. At the whole-group September seminar, principals are led through a data analysis exercise and provided the opportunity to summarize and share their mini-cycle learning with others both within and outside of their own regional cohort group.

After the mini-cycle is completed at the September seminar, the principals are introduced to the process of planning a personal cycle of action research that begins at the October regional cohort meeting and culminates in April, when the principals present their action research to one another at the last whole-group seminar of the year (Click Here to See Personal Action Research Schedule). In addition, principals receive three sets of data to assist them in the development of their wondering:

- Results from the School Culture Survey (Gruenert & Valentine, 1998) administered to building-level administration and teachers and staff;
- Results from an IPLI Leadership Survey based on the national standards for school leaders administered to building-level administration and teachers and staff; and
- Results from Carol Dweck’s “What’s My Mindset” (Mindset Works, Inc., n.d.).

The regional cohort mentors, who have participated in an eight-hour training on coaching action research and receive monthly newsletters and readings on the topic, carefully scaffold their principals through the personal action research cycle. At the regional cohort meeting in October, they engage principals in developing and fine-tuning their wondering or research question with a particular emphasis on focusing the principals during year one on the development of a question that explores their own personal leadership practice. With a question developed in October, the principals prepare a one- to two-page action research plan they bring with them to the November seminar to receive feedback on from their mentor and regional cohort peers. Data collection begins after this process.

The January regional cohort meeting is a time for mentors to check in with their principals on data collection and answer any clarifying questions about action research. February and March meetings are reserved for principals to bring data from their action research to these meetings and receive support from their regional cohort groups in formative and summative analysis. The March meeting also includes time to develop a title and abstract of each principal's research to be printed in a program for the Action Research Sharing Showcase at the April whole-group seminar⁴ and directions for preparing a 10-minute PowerPoint presentation for this purpose.

Principals present their action research to one another in April in a series of three, 30-minute round-table sessions with two principals presenting on related topics at each table each session. When not presenting, principals attend the sessions of others, choosing from many selections from the showcase program. The showcase ends with a celebration of learning at which time each principal is recognized and receives an "action research pin" to commemorate the learning that has occurred through the principal's first full cycle of the action research process.

AR Projects and Feedback

Principals found their action research "wonderings" using their IPLI data: a self-assessment of their personal leadership capacity, a non-evaluative staff survey that rated their performance based on the national standards for principals, and a self-assessment about their growth mindset. In addition, seminar topics and professional books given to IPLI participants stimulated self-reflection. The 2015 showcase topics illustrate how these principals chose to focus their inquiry wonderings (Table 1).

Table 1
IPLI Showcase Inquiry Topics

PRINCIPALS' WONDERINGS: DILEMMAS, PROBLEMS, ISSUES, TENSIONS		TOPIC FREQUENCY
Focus on Leadership Style 29%	Developing a Culture of Shared Decision Making and Distributed Leadership	5
	Becoming a Leader Others Want to Follow	4
	Shifting From Manager to Instructional Leader	2
	Effective Time and Calendar Management	2
	Motivating and Supporting Students	2
	Shifting to Positive Discipline	1
	Dealing With a New School Placement	1
Focus on Instructional Guidance 38%	Effective Instructional Coaching	8
	Developing Relevant Instructional PD	4
	Increasing Time and Strategies for Supporting Teachers	4
	Navigating the PLC School Model	3
	Enhancing Curriculum Coherency	3
Focus on Continuous Improvement 21%	Improving School and Organizational Culture	6
	Encouraging a Growth Mindset	3
	Nurturing Data-Driven Practice	2
	Fostering Authentic Collaboration	1
Focus on Connections 12%	Using Social Media for Creative Communication and Controlling the Message	4
	Improving Communication With Parents and Family Involvement	2
	Networking With Other Principals	1
100%	Total Showcase Presentations	58 ⁵

While some principals focused on organizational problems, school climate, and the need to network electronically, most dealt with dilemmas and tensions related to their changing roles and authority in the schools. Leadership style makes a difference, and 29% chose to analyze their leadership confidence and credibility. While some explored digital leadership, others worked on projecting positivity and using positive discipline with students. A few tried rearranging their calendars to make more time for critical conversations with staff, and others adjusted decision-making to redistribute leadership in hopes of creating a healthy and viable school culture.

Effective instructional guidance presented challenges for 38% of the principals. They focused on instructional coaching by building a more extensive repertoire of instructional strategies, keener observational skills, and stronger collegial relationships. They considered how to tap into available community resources in order to make professional development affordable and peer coaching both relevant and possible.

For 21%, they explored how to foster the attitudes and actions needed to nurture continuous improvement in their schools. Acknowledging avoidances, questioning assumptions, identifying roadblocks, imagining what could be, inspiring innovation, measuring the impact of change—these growth-mindset discussions became agenda topics with their staff.

The remaining 12% examined their communication habits and how to build better internal and external networks. They investigated how to use social media—Twitter, Facebook, school websites, newsletters—to portray a positive image of their schools, to connect with families, and to stay informed about professional trends and resources.

After the showcase, the principals responded positively when asked on an IPLI survey, “Based on your experience in using the action research process, how comfortable do you feel continuing to use this process to increase your leadership capacity?” On a comfort scale of 1 to 10, 87% rated their comfort levels at 8 or above. Principals expressed satisfaction with their action research projects in their concluding thoughts in their April research summaries.

I believe that the action research project I completed was a very valuable experience for me both professionally and personally. It was extremely nice to take time out of a busy year and focus on something I have a passion for. I believe I have learned to be a better leader within my building.

The action research project was good for me, because the answer to my wondering (writing a newsletter) was something that I didn't like. I didn't like them as a teacher, and I swore for years that I wouldn't do one in a school I led. Fast-forward to life after this action research project....I will never go through another school year without one.

[T]he action research journey was one of great benefit for me as a professional. Through this process, I have been able to build in time in my weekly schedule to allocate to my own professional development. I have been able to use the wide variety of resources already at my disposal to improve my knowledge, skills, and understanding of best practices in education and educational leadership specifically.

In retrospect, I view this journey as one of the most gratifying periods of my administrative career. This process has taught me to be a more patient listener, as well as a valued collaborator and team member.

I am so pleased to have conducted this action research. I feel much more equipped as the head learner and leader in my school to move forward as a true professional learning community.

The action research process was revealing and provided a meaningful chance for me to solicit input from teachers and engage in reflection on what will help us move forward as a staff. The result is a great resource that will streamline basic communication and allow us to focus on instructional practices that have the greatest impact on student learning.

IPLI believes that the learning capacity of the principal creates the foundation for the school's capacity to learn. The principals in Cohort 2 embraced the growth mindset of action research and expressed readiness to introduce inquiry into their schools, to enhance the data literacy of their colleagues, and to transform their schools' learning capacity.

Reflections: Lessons Learned

The action research work of the Cohort 2 principals during year one of the program indicates the promise engagement in action research holds to provide powerful and meaningful professional learning opportunities for administrators. While the IPLI

professional development program is still in its infancy and we continue to document, track, and study the principals in IPLI and their action research efforts, we have already learned many important lessons about how to roll out an action research professional development program for administrators from our work in designing and implementing this experience for IPLI. In this section, we share three of these lessons learned to help others who wish to institute a program of principal action research begin the process.

Lesson #1: Start Small

Principals are under constant stress and pressure, and often describe the pace of their work as “harried” at best. For example, principal Mike Connolly (2007) wrote about what one would see by peeking into the office of a typical principal:

What would you see? A desk piled high with papers, the telephone ringing incessantly, 40 or 50 emails screaming for attention, a line of people queuing up outside the door, and a harried principal. Most principals have not learned you can't fit 10 pounds of task into a 5-pound day. Far from being models of self-control, balance, and rationality, many principals resemble butterflies on speed pills. They can't devote sustained attention to anything. (p. 32)

Because their days are so full, when action research is first introduced to principals as a part of a professional development program, it can be met with a great deal of fear and trepidation for the time it will take to engage in the process. To ease this fear and trepidation, IPLI introduced the process to the principals in the program through their engagement in the action research mini-cycle, a small, introductory activity that required just 60–90 minutes of a principal's time between the July summer action research kick-off and the September whole-group seminar. When the action research mini-cycle was presented, the time it would take to complete the cycle was highlighted, relieving principals' concerns about time commitment before the options for the mini-cycle were even introduced. Starting small eased the principals into the process, and when they experienced the mini-cycle and found value in completing it, they became less apprehensive about the time it would take to complete a full, personal cycle of action research.

Barth (2001) informs us that one reason it is so difficult for school leaders to become learners is lack of time, but reminds us, “For principals, as for all of us, protesting a lack of time is another way of saying other things are more important and perhaps more comfortable” (p. 157). A good first step in introducing principals to the action research process is acknowledging that lack of time will always be an issue that confronts

principals in all they do, and while you acknowledge time as a potential barrier to engagement in action research, make a simultaneous commitment to engage in this important and necessary work by starting small, in a way that feels manageable and not overwhelming to the principals, allowing them to gain familiarity with the process first. In so doing, principals become more willing to embrace action research as an item of importance in their daily work, and make time to engage in fully implementing the process.

Lesson #2: Anticipate the Challenge of Focusing Principals on Their Own Leadership Practice

While starting small helps ease principals into the process and creates the conditions for principals to build a commitment to action research, once that commitment is built, it is challenging to convince principals to take the time to focus on themselves first, before they endeavor to apply the process of action research to efforts at whole-school improvement. Yet, understanding and improving one's personal leadership capacity is an important prerequisite to improving one's school.

Roland Barth (1990) draws upon the common instructions given by flight attendants on every airplane flight related to the donning of oxygen masks should there be a change in cabin pressure to explain the importance of principals focusing on their own learning. Flight attendants instruct passengers to put on their own masks first before assisting others, for if people do not take care of themselves, they will be unable to care for others. Applying this metaphor to the principalship, Barth writes:

In schools we spend a great deal of time placing oxygen masks on other people's faces while we ourselves are suffocating. Principals, preoccupied with expected outcomes, desperately want teachers to breathe in new ideas, yet do not themselves engage in visible, serious learning. Teachers badly want their students to learn to perform at grade level, yet seldom reveal themselves to children as learners. It is small wonder that anyone learns anything in schools. (p. 42)

For this reason, it makes sense for principals to focus their initial action research endeavors on themselves and their own leadership practice. However, in the habit of sacrificing themselves for the teachers and the students in their buildings, it is not surprising that many principals find it difficult to use the process of action research to take care of themselves before they use it to take care of others. Many IPLI mentors shared the challenge of coaching principals to focus their personal action research projects inward on self-understanding and self-improvement, rather than outward on

understanding and improving teacher and student performance at their schools. IPLI Mentor Jane Rogers reflects:

It was difficult at first to encourage principals to focus on themselves during the action research process. It is typical for principals to be outward thinkers and planners. Principals, by nature, are selfless in their willingness to give their time to help and support others in the learning process. Time management often dictates that principals pay attention to details of the school day including scheduling everything from lunch, recess, busses, classes, after-school events, and more. With this in mind, the challenge of asking principals to focus on themselves could be an overwhelming task.

The IPLI process purposefully addressed this challenge in three ways. First, forming cohort groups allowed principals the opportunity to connect with a mentor and other principals in close proximity. The principals communicated with each other frequently to keep on track. Secondly, the participation in a mini-action research project allowed principals the opportunity to focus on themselves for a short-term project. Finally, by building on the success of the action research mini-cycle, principals thought about how they could stretch this idea and enhance their leadership capacity throughout the year. Principals then crafted wonderings that would improve their leadership even while the project improved something in the school (personal communication, August 11, 2015)

In sum, it is important to anticipate that principals will need help and support in focusing the subject of their action research on themselves and their own administrative practice.

Lesson #3: Be Patient and Recognize That Out of Dissonance Comes Growth

While IPLI principals were able to build an initial commitment to action research through the action research mini-cycle and subsequently focus their personal action research cycles on themselves and their own administrative practice through support and coaching from their mentors, mentors reported that at various times during each individual step of the personal action research process, principals would report skepticism about their projects as they were unfolding over the course of the year and wonder if, indeed, they were really learning anything of importance that would impact their work. Mentor Mike Pinto reflects:

For some, the idea of action research is innate. Like a person who can fix a motor without a manual, they constantly reflect, re-evaluate, set goals, collect data, and start again. But for many, this concept of taking a breath and looking inward and also reflecting on each step taken is new. The value of the action research process comes in the ability to reflect. If not intentionally taught, for many it doesn't happen.

Chunking the personal action research cycle into monthly segments for the principals (developing a wondering, developing a plan for your action research, collecting data, analyzing data, and presenting your learning to others) was a great way to intentionally teach that ability to reflect. In the end, at the Action Research Showcase in April, each individual part came together into a whole, but navigating the waters that got the principals to that point was sometimes a tricky path. Principals would sometimes get bogged down in the details of each individual step of the action research cycle, and weren't yet able to see their projects as a whole.

It's the difference between a microscopic and a 30,000-foot view many times along the way. Individuals would get bogged down on the minutia and not understand how each step led them up the staircase. It wasn't until they shared their action research at the April Showcase that they could actually see and appreciate the action research road they had traveled and view the action research of others as well. Sometimes seeing someone else's work makes your work more meaningful. (personal communication, August 10, 2015)

It became an important job of the IPLI mentors to provide reassurance to the principals during times when they became "bogged down" in individual components of the process, such as deciding what their "question" would be and analyzing data, a process that can feel overwhelming at the start leading to "data analysis paralysis" when principals lament, "Okay, I've collected all the *stuff*, but I have no clue what to do with it now!" (Dana, 2009, p. 105). The mentors' investment in reassurance during these times of struggle paid off in April when the principals presented to one another, at which time they were able to see and understand the totality, and value their learning through the process of action research. In essence, the principals had to "live through" the complete cycle once before they could appreciate each individual component of their work during this program of professional development. Sometimes, the individual steps would cause dissonance. Yet, it was out of this dissonance that growth occurred. Anticipating dissonance and persevering through it is a critical component of building a successful professional development program of action research for principals.

Conclusions

While it is early in the development and implementation of IPLI, there is evidence that the ways action research has been incorporated into this two-year professional development program is indeed having an impact on principals as they perceive the process of action research to be a meaningful mechanism for their own professional learning. At the start of Year 2 of the program, one principal even shared her intent to introduce action research to all of the teachers in her building:

I absolutely love the action research process and buy into it...not only for administrators, but for teachers. The teacher leader that I brought to the July IPLI meeting is just as fired up about the process as I am for this year. We have brainstormed how we want to launch the idea and process to the staff in replacement of our “yearly professional goals” that get made at the beginning of the year and put on the shelf until the end of the year for review. The AR process will allow for ongoing, meaningful personal/professional development to occur. (K. Laffoon, personal communication, July 16, 2015)

In addition, one mentor has convinced her district to use the IPLI action research model with its entire leadership staff, and subsequently, the teachers in this district as well. This district is currently making plans to transform the ways professional development has historically been approached, reframing professional development as inquiry.

The purpose of this article was to provide a description of this program to share the promise action research appears to hold for principal professional development as well as to share lessons we have learned from the design and implementation of an extensive action research program for principals early in its implementation. Additional research and program evaluation efforts are underway to follow these principals long-term throughout the remainder of their IPLI professional development experience and after graduation. In year two, principals will select two teacher-leaders to join them in the study of their school and creation of an action research school improvement project. As per IPLI’s conceptual model, all action research during year two will focus on increasing the school’s learning capacity and will be guided by the overarching wondering: “How do we increase the learning capacity of our school?” Individual principal and teacher teams will develop their own sub-wonderings that focus more specifically on the pathway they wish to take in their schools to increase learning capacity and study the results. Partnering with Marzano Research, IPLI utilizes the High Reliability Schools™ surveys to collect school data to assist principals and their

teachers in developing their sub-wonderings. Seminars and principals' regional focus-cohort meetings center on building the learning capacity of schools through the use of professional learning communities and development of a school-wide action research project. Year two of IPLI concludes with an IPLI Showcase of Schools where each school will share its action research project. After graduation from the institute, IPLI will continue to track long-term effects of the program on principal leadership and school improvement through a longitudinal quantitative and qualitative research study. We are looking forward to following and studying these principals as they continue their work as action researchers, as well as continuing to study, reflect, and refine IPLI and the role action research plays within it based on lessons we continue to learn as the architects of the IPLI action research experience.

Principals need powerful professional development models to be developed, studied, refined, and shared to provide support for school leaders after they are hired into administrative positions. As Barth (1990) explains,

[S]ustaining the development of school leaders is crucial to the quality of life and to the best interests of all who inhabit the schoolhouse – and to their development as a community of learners. Principals, no less than teachers, need replenishment and invigoration and an expanded repertoire of ideas and practices with which to respond to staggering demands. (p. 46)

Action research is one promising practice for administrator professional development that can replenish and invigorate principals, providing them with a systematic and intentional way to respond to the staggering demands of their work.

Notes

1. The Indiana State Board of Education has adopted letter grades (A, B, C, D, and F) to indicate how well Indiana schools are performing. For more information, please see <http://www.doe.in.gov/accountability>.
2. Please see <https://www.edleadersnetwork.org/>
3. Please see http://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/forming_ground_rules.pdf
4. Please see <http://www.indianapli.org/wp-content/uploads/AR-Showcase.pdf>
5. While there was a total of 57 principals in Cohort 2, one mentor voluntarily engaged in her own cycle of action research alongside the principals she was coaching in the process. This mentor's project was included in the analysis.

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Doing-It-Ourselves as Teacher Researchers: A Collaborative Action Research Approach for Improving Literacy Support at Home

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes what a group of teacher researchers learned from conducting an action research project in an urban elementary school serving a multilingual community in the northeastern United States. A key goal of the project was to enhance parents' and caregivers' support of students' literacy development in ways that built on home literacy practices. Teachers' learning included understanding the importance of true collaboration, responding to parent feedback, and teacher-led professional development.

 **literacy** teachers as researchers have received fairly short shift in recent years, at least within the United States. This is unsurprising, given the enormous emphasis placed on standardized literacy tests and test preparation, on teacher evaluations that use a narrow set of skills to judge instructional quality, and a return to pre-packaged, commercial literacy instruction kits and programs in schools (cf. Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, 2011; Knobel & Kalman, in press). In the U.S., even the preparation of reading specialists (teachers certified as advanced experts in the area of reading) typically overlooks the important role teacher research can play in teacher learning and expertise development. None of the International Literacy Association's standards for evaluating the preparation of reading specialists, for example, include conducting teacher research as an element of this role. This is despite

emphasis within the standards on reading specialists as “leaders” and as deliverers of professional development experiences (ILA, 2015a). Instead, the standards—especially standard 6—emphasize reading “relevant research” by means of meetings and study groups and building the results of this reading into practice (ILA, 2015b). An emphasis on reading specialists *consuming*, rather than *producing*, “relevant research,” leaves little room for learning how to ask and address teachers’ actual questions about immediate instructional and student learning concerns. As such, a key motivating factor in the project described in this paper was to engage a group of reading specialists-in-training in a research *production* orientation towards literacy-related professional development. This orientation foregrounds teachers’ abilities to generate professional development experiences that are meaningful and thoroughly situated within their own contexts, and recognizes their professional knowledge and expertise. This stance requires teachers to become well-qualified researchers in their own right and to understand research from the inside as producers. An insider understanding of research design and processes also means teacher researchers are equipped with criteria for evaluating and critiquing published research literature, rather than perhaps reading study outcomes, and regarding them as “true” and “un-challengeable” (cf. Lankshear & Knobel, 2011, ch. 8).

This “producers” orientation towards research is influenced by a growing body of academic work that documents how Do-It-Yourself (DIY) practices shift everyday people from consuming media and goods produced for them, to producing their own in personally and socially satisfying ways. Even more aptly for current purposes, Henry Jenkins (2010) has built on this DIY academic interest and argued for a focus on “Do-It-Ourselves” instead, in order to recognize how we rarely learn something completely on our own. Rather, we make use of in-person or distributed networks of resources and communities of support where “we learn *from each other* in the process of *working together* to achieve shared goals” (Jenkins, 2010, p. 233; original emphases). Of course, collaborative approaches to teacher research aren’t new, and the kind of project reported here does not break new ground, but under current conditions of decreased teacher autonomy and increased individual teacher accountability and evaluation within U.S. education, a re-emphasis on truly collaborative teacher research is no bad thing.

A “Do-It-Ourselves” orientation also places useful emphasis on teachers *being* researchers. That is, on them developing a strong sense of what counts as good quality research within education. This includes a sound understanding of research design and how to develop a sound research question, how to frame their project using theory and key concepts, how to collect appropriate and robust data, and how to analyze and interpret it systematically and in relation to past and current developments within

the field. As such, a “Do-It-Ourselves” orientation foregrounds teachers teaching themselves to be academic researchers by taking primary responsibility for conducting well-informed and well-designed projects.

In what follows, we describe the experiences of, and learning outcomes for, five reading specialists-in-training in one cycle of an ongoing collaborative action research project within an urban school located within a significantly economically depressed city in the northeastern United States. This project was prompted by the school’s goal of involving parents and caregivers more actively in their children’s learning. It was organized around a teacher study group that included five teachers from this school—in addition to the five reading specialists-in-training who initially brought the study group together (i.e., 10 teachers in total). Project leaders and participating teachers worked together to develop what became a series of “Family Literacy Nights” aimed at providing concrete resources for parents and caregivers to use at home to support their children’s literacy growth. Due to university research review board restrictions, we are unable to report the action research study itself and do not follow the conventions of a research report in this paper. We focus instead on what five novice teacher researchers learned as a result of designing and conducting an action research project and what they gained from taking a “Do-It-Ourselves” approach. In terms of the authorship of this paper, the five teacher researchers are: Beatrice Hanratty, Andreia Onofre, Catia Guerra, Michele Tedeschi, and Laura Wilenchik. Michele Knobel was the consulting university professor for this project.

In what follows, we describe two contexts that directly shaped the “Family Literacy Nights” project. This is followed by a discussion of the study group and how it employed an action research process. The paper closes with a discussion of the outcomes of the initial “Family Literacy Night” and what was learned from the research process itself.

Context

There are two contexts for this project: one comprises a university Masters-level course, and the other a large, urban school in a significantly low-income area.

The course is part of a Masters of Reading program that prepares teachers to be reading specialists. Teachers enrolled in this course are required to work in groups to develop literacy-focused professional development experiences for teaching colleagues at local schools, and to embed this professional development within a

collaborative action research design. Collaborative action research is defined in this course in terms of consensually identifying a real problem or question to investigate and address in order to improve or enhance teaching practice and/or student learning experiences or outcomes in some way (texts used include: Altrichter, Posch, & Somekh, 1993; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). The design of the project itself comprises bringing together a group of classroom teachers to develop a research question to address, framing the study with an appropriate theoretical orientation, collaboratively developing ways of addressing the research question, trialing these and collecting data to help evaluate their effectiveness or suitability, analyzing collected data, using the results of the analysis to inform a new round of addressing the research question, and so on. The first seven weeks of the 15-week course focus explicitly on critiquing the quality of published literacy research, on research design, on using literacy and learning theories to frame research, and on collecting and analyzing data in systematic ways. The remainder of the course entails teacher researcher groups meeting with Michele, the instructor, every two weeks to discuss progress, ask questions, check the systematicity of their data coding, and so on.

This paper focuses on a project by one teacher research group (i.e., Beatrice, Andreia, Catia, Michele, and Laura). Two of the teachers in this group—Andreia and Catia—work in a large elementary school in the northeast of the U.S. (464 students). The majority of students enrolled in this school are Hispanic (44%) or white non-Hispanic (34%), with the remainder comprising Asian/Pacific Islander (9%), Asian (9%), and Black non-Hispanic (4%) students. Twenty percent of these students have been assessed as having “limited English proficiency” and the school has developed a very successful Spanish bilingual program. This school became the “host” for the group’s professional development project, and a group of five classroom teachers (one teacher from each grade level in the school) volunteered to be part of the project. A recently established goal for this school was to improve home-school communication and parent involvement in supporting their children’s learning. At the time, classroom teachers in the host school had been looking for existing parental involvement initiatives to help guide their own initiatives, and this became the springboard for the professional development action research project described in this paper.

Comments from the five classroom teachers who volunteered to be part of this action research study underscored some of the frustrations they were encountering in trying to improve how they interacted and worked with their students’ parents. “This has been a challenge at [host school] for years, especially after we have become so well known for our bilingual program,” explained Ms. Sagui, a first grade teacher (25 bilingual and general education students). “I find it so challenging to communicate

with parents who don't speak English and I don't have the tools to communicate with them in their home languages, so I'm stuck," explained Ms. Moore, a fifth grade teacher (23 English language learning students). "Although all of my parents speak English, it is a struggle to get them to help at home, especially with reading in first grade which is such a crucial grade," added Mrs. Rathgeber, a first grade teacher (24 general education students). Ms. Casale, a third grade teacher (22 bilingual and general education students) pointed out, "It's hard enough getting bilingual working parents here on Back-to-School night because they don't have anyone to watch the children." The fifth participant, Mrs. Tatarenko, a second grade teacher (22 bilingual and general education students), had always been very involved with the parents of her students, but indicated she was very open to additional suggestions for enhancing this relationship and was interested in sharing her own ideas with others (all comments from initial interviews with participating classroom teachers, September 2014).

A Brief Description of the Action Research Project

The research question developed collaboratively was: "What happens when teachers provide parents with explicit strategies for supporting at-home literacy learning practices?" The theoretical framing for the study usefully blended Luis Moll's and colleagues' conception of "funds of knowledge" with James Paul Gee's conception of D/discourses. Funds of knowledge are the cumulative results of family members' lived experiences (at home, at work, within their communities, etc.), their historicity (ethnicity, how things were done in their own families), their ways of doing things, and so on, that collectively serve to maintain the well-being of their family (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). This concept is fully grounded in the conviction that "people are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge" (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005, pp. ix-x). The concept, "funds of knowledge," was developed in direct response to the construction of poor and minority students by schools as "deficient" when they came to school (e.g., they "lack" English, they "lack" academic ability or motivation, etc.). A focus on "funds of knowledge" requires researchers and educators to attend to the rich stores of knowledge, ideas, and practices to be found in homes and to use them as a foundation for student learning.

Gee's (2015) theory of "big D" Discourses casts Discourses as "ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and, often, reading and writing, that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities ... by specific groups" (p. 4). "Big D" Discourses help to explain how society is socially shaped and constructed and

how our own ways of being in the world are informed by these socially recognized and patterned ways of being and doing. Gee distinguishes two types of Discourses: primary and secondary. The primary Discourse is typically the Discourse one is “born into” and experiences at home (Gee, 2015). Secondary Discourses are encountered outside the home or family and describe forms of being and doing within social institutions, such as schools (Gee, 2015). The secondary Discourses that students encounter in schools typically are part of dominant Discourses; that is, the ways of acting, interacting, valuing, thinking, speaking, accruing success, and so on that are shaped, constructed, judged, and maintained by the group who holds the most power within a given society (Gee, 2015). Thus, it follows that children whose primary Discourse bears close resemblance to the secondary Discourses of schooling are, by default, going to have an “easier” time at school in terms of being the “right” kinds of students and doing the “right” kind of learning work. According to this theory, students whose primary Discourses differ quite markedly from the secondary Discourses of schooling often find school itself puzzling or contradictory, which can impinge negatively on their learning (see related accounts in Heath, 1983; Lareau, 2011).

Bringing together “funds of knowledge” and Discourses meant that the action research project itself necessarily emphasized the importance of not simply acknowledging children’s “background knowledge,” but worked to identify what funds of knowledge they had access to at home and how these could be explicitly recognized and valued in classrooms in order to help students operate more effectively in the secondary Discourse of their school (cf. Fiano, 2013; Hedges, 2011; Moje et al., 2004). Gee (2015) explains it is not enough for students to adapt to and learn school-based Discourse, but that the school must include and value the students’ primary Discourses as well. The creation of open, reciprocal relationships between families and teachers enables conversations about parents’ own lived experiences of schooling when they were young, about learning to read and write, and how literacy practices are used in their everyday lives.

As a reminder, due to Institutional Review Board requirements, this paper cannot be presented as a research study report per se, but as a description of what a group of teacher researchers learned about professional development and the research process as the result of conducting collaborative action research designed to involve parents more in supporting their children’s literacy learning at home. In what follows, we describe the project and its outcomes first, then what was learned by the teacher researchers.

To begin, initial information about parent-teacher communication and relationships was collected by means of two school-wide Likert-scale type surveys: one targeting teachers and the other targeting parents and caregivers. Responses from the 36 teacher surveys and the 115 returned parent surveys suggested that most teachers and parents agreed that parental involvement is important in enhancing student achievement at school. Where the two groups did not agree concerned knowing how to offer effective support at home. Parents responded that they *did* know how to help, while the majority of teachers responded that parents did *not* know how to help students with schoolwork at home. Addressing this disconnect therefore became an initial point of focus for this project, with a focus on literacy making the project manageable.

The project group met every Tuesday afternoon for 90 minutes over 14 weeks to discuss theory and research, and to identify and plan practical ideas for working directly with families. To begin, the group read academic articles concerning funds of knowledge research, as well as research on the relationship between parental involvement in their child's learning at home and student achievement at school (e.g., Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Jaynes, 2012; Reese & Gallimore, 2000; Robbins & Searby, 2013). The group decided a "Family Literacy Night" in mid-November would be a manageable initial response to the research question driving this project. The evening itself would include presentations from the classroom teachers regarding how to support literacy learning at home and discussions with parents about what they—the parents—felt worked well already. This became the first cycle of their project and the focus of this paper.

The collaborative nature of this project meant the reading specialists-in-training initially supplied a range of resources to help generate ideas and to encourage the five classroom teachers to begin looking for and developing their own ideas. Thus, teachers were initially directed towards ReadingRockets.org and its wealth of articles and practical videos about literacy teaching and learning, including teaching in bilingual contexts and articles written for parents. TeachersPayTeachers.com, with its teacher-generated lesson ideas, plans, and resources, was also an initial recommendation. The group established a collaborative Pinterest.com board, and the classroom teachers soon became active "pinners" of relevant ideas and resources to this site. Weekly meetings focused on how to best help parents support their children's literacy learning at home, taking into account the importance of including as much as possible of each family's funds of knowledge.

“First Cycle” Project Outcomes

It soon became apparent to the group members that if they wanted to take families’ funds of knowledge seriously, they needed to hold more than one Family Literacy Night. Thus, it was decided that the first event would act as an introduction to a series of nights that would provide space for parents to share information about home literacy practices and for accessing strategies that built on these practices in support of student literacy learning at home.

One unexpected outcome of this project was the interest and commitment it inspired in others outside the group. The principal of the host school, for example, became a very active supporter of the initiative and attended the inaugural Family Literacy Night, formally welcoming and then later chatting with parents. Four additional classroom teachers from the host school, including the school’s English language teacher, became involved as well. The teacher researchers themselves were quite surprised at how much interest was shown by others, and how much support and help was voluntarily offered in what quickly became a very supportive network.

The first Family Literacy Night was well advertised to all parents and students. It was held mid-week in late October 2014, and 46 families attended. One parent who attended had not been able to make it to school events before and described how her Grade 3 daughter had come home, checked her mother’s work schedule to ascertain her mother wouldn’t be working the evening of the first Family Literacy Night and that she therefore could—and had to—attend. The action research group provided child-minding services as part of this family-focused event in order to maximize parents’ and caregivers’ attendance. Two classroom teachers from the group designed a range of craft activities for the children in their care for the 75 minutes (i.e., 6:00-7:15 p.m.) of the first Family Literacy Night, and found themselves watching over 91 children. The parents and caregivers themselves were seated at tables, facing a screen and the classroom teacher presenters. Additional tables held relevant materials (e.g., a graph emphasizing the importance of reading to children for 20 minutes a day; a list of useful apps; a summary of text genres and their features). Many of these handouts were translated into Spanish by teachers involved in the project, including teachers who were not Spanish speakers themselves, but who made use of Google Translate and other online resources.

The classroom teachers opened the event with the quote: “Children are made readers on the laps of their parents” (attributed to Emilie Buchwald, an award-winning children’s author). This quote was a motif for the night, and the Parents and Teachers

Association had printed up bookmarks carrying this slogan to be sent home with attendees. Parents also watched a video titled, “The Power of Reading to Your Children” (VideoNow Productions, 2011). The teachers wanted to share accessible, research-informed resources with parents, and video content addressed reading and book awareness with very young children (aged three months and up), oral language and interactions, how parents shouldn’t worry about how well they themselves read, and that any interaction around texts will benefit children. Participating teachers quietly helped with simultaneously translating the video’s English voicetrack for small groups of Spanish-speaking parents. A range of useful websites and apps was also presented (building on an awareness that children made use of their parents’ smartphones at times to play games, etc.), including an overview of the two digital systems in place in the school—Accelerate Reader and RAZ Kids—to better familiarize parents with both systems.

A key point emphasized throughout the night was the importance of reading to children, even if they could read already, in order to model effective reading, enthusiasm for reading, and for discussing important elements within the text (e.g., character development and how it related to children’s own decision-making processes). Another key point conveyed to parents was that it didn’t matter what parents and children read together at home, either, and that texts could include everyday texts found at home, like recipe books, religious materials, magazines, newspapers from their parents’ country of origin, and so on. This alone seemed to be advice parents found valuable, so that when Mrs. Tatarenko explained, “Reading together is a shared event that can occur in any language,” one parent asked, “So, it’s okay to read in two languages to my child?” and was met with strong confirmation from the teachers. Teachers also repeatedly encouraged parents to make reading a part of normal, daily life and to relate the texts they read together to the child’s and family’s daily life experiences as much as possible.

The portion of the evening that really drew parents and caregivers into a conversation with the teachers occurred when parents were presented with a number of vignettes of struggling readers. The cases (from Leipzig, 2001) were used to spark a lively discussion concerning what each reader needed in terms of additional reading support (e.g., support with understanding what was being read, decoding unfamiliar words, addressing frustration and reading fluency). Parents and caregivers were very engaged, especially when they were able to identify key problem areas themselves and collectively discuss ways of addressing them at home. They commented on how they recognized some of the difficulties described in the vignettes in their own children (e.g., frustration with getting the text to make sense, expressing loathing towards reading, avoiding reading altogether). Parents and caregivers were encouraged to identify areas where

their own child could use some more support and sign up for a related workshop in the next Family Literacy Night event (scheduled for early December).

The teachers wrapped up this first Family Literacy Night—and the first cycle of their action research project—by passing out an eight-item survey (available in Spanish and English) that asked attendees to rate possible future literacy workshops (e.g., on comprehension, rhymes and poetry, bilingual reading aloud, promoting reading interest) based on level of interest/need. The workshops were described briefly, and it was explained how the workshop leader would provide each group with a set of practical strategies and the parents would work directly with their child or children right then and there to practice these strategies, before regrouping and discussing how things went, what they learned about helping their child, and so on. The survey also asked about the primary language spoken at home (languages identified were: English, Spanish, Polish, Gujarati, and Chinese) and for feedback on the evening. Forty surveys were completed in English and six in Spanish.

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive. For example:

- “Please go around to other elementary schools in the district and do this literacy night!”
- “Fantastic! I love that you are having ‘Literacy Nights.’ Much needed and timely. I’d like to help my daughter with the stress of taking and passing her [Accelerated Reader] quizzes.”
- “Lots of great tips were provided at this meeting to continue to help my child with the love of reading.”
- “I love the list of websites and apps!”

While families were leaving, a number of them were heard saying to each other: “We have to come back December third.” One teacher researcher later overheard two students in her Grade 3 class discussing which literacy workshop their parents would be participating in on the next Family Literacy Night.

Professional Development Outcomes

All participating classroom teachers agreed that the project group was an essential component of their professional development, with all of them agreeing they’d collectively learned a significant amount about how to better support families and

literacy development at home. In addition, they agreed that the group itself served as a valuable support network. As Mrs. Casale explained, “It’s comforting to know that you are not the only one dealing with these issues.” The teachers especially appreciated how their meetings enabled them to pool their ideas and expertise:

Having regular meetings allowed us to share our individual input and ideas as well as gain a different perspective from listening to each other. We became focused on our common goal and were then able to work together to move forward. (Personal communication, Mrs. Tatarenko)

“Collaboration” was certainly a strong theme for the group members. This included strengthening their collaborative relationships with one another, as well as with specialists outside the group, such as the host school’s English language teacher.

All the teachers felt strongly that they’d been able to meet their goals for the first cycle of their project, and were very pleased with the outcomes of their initial Family Literacy Night in terms of how it very much opened up a dialogue between teachers and parents about how to best support students’ literacy development. Mrs. Sagui appreciated how the group’s goals and plans ended in real action:

Thinking back to our surveys in September, we identified “lack of family involvement” as a big issue in our school. After working together and implementing [our first] Family Literacy Night, all of the things we envisioned we were able to achieve. We were truly able to connect a need to an action. (Concluding group interview, November 25, 2014)

Mrs. Tatarenko alluded to the negative media their area regularly attracted with respect to schooling, teachers, and students, and emphasized instead how their initial Family Literacy Night really helped them to address such misperceptions:

By implementing Family Literacy Night events we are showing that we do not stop caring about our students and their families at 3:00 p.m. By taking on this challenge, we are actively working to erase the stigma against schools and teachers that negative publicity has created. We are fighting the negative and gaining respect back for the profession. We are showing parents that [host school] is a warm and caring place where the whole family is welcomed. (Concluding group interview, November 25, 2014)

While the extent to which literacy support at home and at school impacts positively on students' school achievement remains to be seen, these comments and outcomes certainly resonate with the "Do-It-Ourselves" ethic of this project that emphasizes teachers taking on real problems within their own teaching contexts and developing ways to address them. They also resonate with the ideals of enhanced professionalism, of grass-roots approaches to professional learning, and of better support to student literacy learning as a result of professional development initiatives.

Project fieldnotes are replete with group discussion of the connection between theory, research, and practice. As one example among many, the group's plans for the workshops for the second Literacy Night deliberately included parents working directly with their own children to practice new strategies or methods for supporting reading. This was influenced by reading about effective approaches to professional development (e.g., Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011), and they wanted to engage parents in similar development processes in order to help maximize parents' own insights and learning.

Documenting the study formally finished at the end of November 2014. The action research group continued to meet each week after the First Literacy Night. Part of its ongoing work has included sending "Thank You" cards to the families who attended the first Family Literacy Night to show how appreciative these teachers were of their commitment to wanting to work together regarding their child's literacy learning. Subsequent meetings have been devoted to finalizing plans for the second and third Literacy Nights. As mentioned earlier, the second night focused on delivering practical workshops, and the third was a response to parents' significant interest in promoting reading interest. This third night—held in early January 2015—was focused simply on enjoying reading and took the form of a pajama party, with everyone coming in their pajamas and teachers modeling how to read in engaging ways, how to discuss books in ways that focused on meaning making, and so on. The Parents and Teacher Association provided hot chocolate and sweet snacks for this third evening. Clearly the group was committed to ongoing cycles of Family Literacy Nights, with each cycle informed by teachers' reading and reflection, parents' feedback and requests, and students' literacy needs.

The group also plans to work on accessing more translators, too—especially speakers of Polish, Chinese, and Gujarati. As Mrs. Casale put it, "It's our goal to support all families. However, our ability to support linguistically diverse families is significantly impaired due to our lack of multilingual translators" (concluding group interview, November 25, 2014). Indeed, another pattern found in the data was a shared

commitment to “communicative flexibility” which was defined in terms of multiple modalities of communication and involvement made available to all families. Clearly, the teachers in this group intend to retain this commitment as they find more and more ways of communicating effectively with school families.

To sum up, outcomes to date suggest that the action research project successfully met its initial goals and opened up more possibilities for parents to become involved in their children’s literacy learning in ways that respected home practices, while ensuring access to school practices associated with improved literacy learning in school. Interesting next steps would be to document any noticeable improvements in students’ literacy practices at school that can be attributed to home support.

Teacher Researchers’ Learning Outcomes

In this paper we’ve aimed at showing how at least one cycle of the action research process of planning, implementation, evaluation, then building on original plans, and so on was practiced by a group of reading specialists-in-training intent on becoming teacher researchers. Participating classroom teachers also collected data and reflected on findings, but our focus here is on the five reading specialists-in-training. We’ve tried to show the importance of having a strong relationship between theory and action, and of using extant research to guide professional learning, while at the same time valuing teachers’ existing knowledge and expertise as they made decisions about what was most needed in terms of working with families.

The five teacher researchers who spearheaded this project really did enact a “Do-It-Ourselves” orientation to teachers *being* researchers. As their advisor who met with them every two weeks in the second half of the semester-long course, Michele noticed how they carefully framed their study theoretically, collaboratively developed a useful guiding question, designed their data collection and analysis processes as cycles, and how they used the results of their data coding to inform what they did next. Early data analysis patterns focused on time issues, for example, but as the project progressed, these fell away and new patterns—like needing to be communicatively flexible in reaching out to parents, and the importance of collaboration—came to the fore as the group allocated dedicated time to work on its project and read up on ways of including parents more actively in their children’s literacy learning. As Beatrice explained, collecting data systematically and then analyzing these data was “most helpful throughout the process” and that “the project itself helped me realize

the impact that teachers can have by putting theory into practice” (e-mail to course instructor, December 2014).

The group members also learned about the importance of time commitment from all participants, including themselves. As Laura explained,

I would have to say that meeting every week face to face was crucial for our study group (and perhaps any study group.) Yes, online meetings and google docs can be successful for communication; however, I truly feel that because each and every one of us met every Tuesday at the same time is why we were all such a good team and on the same page. (E-mail to course instructor, December 2014)

These meetings meant that three of the teacher researchers needed to drive an hour each way to attend once their own teaching day had finished. This commitment was mirrored in the participating classroom teachers, too: “The teachers never used any excuses (holidays, meetings, school work, etc.) to get out of the meetings. They were very serious about that time slot every Tuesday afternoon and always showed up ready to work” (Catia, e-mail to course instructor, December 2014).

This group of teacher researchers also appreciated the extent to which they and the participating classroom teachers were truly able to collaborate in addressing a problem that was very real to them, even when in the beginning, this required some tricky navigation between “when to support the teachers and when to let them work through situations” (Beatrice, e-mail to course instructor, December 2014). Indeed, the idea of collaborative action research instigated and conducted solely by teachers as a truly viable alternative to top-down, one-size-fits all professional development experiences was a significant learning point for at least one member of the group. As Michele (Tedeschi) wrote:

The major take away I gained from participating in the research process is that teachers must actively initiate action research opportunities. Prior to completing this research I was misguided in the sense that I believed that teachers were not given opportunities to facilitate large-scale change. Through completing this study I have learned it is not necessary for teachers to be granted these opportunities. Rather, it is entirely possible for teachers to create their own opportunities. Initially I was nervous about involving the principal at our host school. However, the support and accolades we received from the principal now cause me to wonder why administrators *would not* support programs for school-wide improvement.

Through working with our project group I have learned that when teachers work together and unify under a common voice they are able to enact significant change.

Collectively, what these teacher researchers learned from designing and implementing their own well-designed research project resonates with the International Literacy Association's expectations regarding teacher leaders (ILA, 2015a), but adds an important dimension of agency and production to the description of teacher "leaders" given in the standards for reading specialists.

Conclusion

The importance of a Do-It-Ourselves orientation towards teacher research, especially when it is conducted as part of university coursework, cannot be underestimated. In this particular case, the teacher researchers were apprenticed to *being* academic researchers and held to high standards in terms of designing and reporting their project. Their instructor has every confidence that each of them is now well able to produce independent, sound qualitative research in their respective school settings. The project focus took a real-world problem and resulted in very concrete action, informed by theory and extant research, while at the same time was tailored specifically to the families of the host school. The action research project became a rich context for professional learning and growth. This meets the ideals posed by Ravitch (2014), who argues that the

promise of practitioner-driven research is that the learning emerges from local, situated inquiry, the kind of inquiry that leads practitioners to engage in evidence-based practice—in a reinvigorated sense of that term, meaning that it is grounded in our own contexts, practices, and settings. (p. 6)

But even more than this, the teacher researchers and their group of classroom teachers learned the benefits to be gained from taking a problem and making it their own to resolve, and working together to do so.

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Making Room for Inquiry and Creativity From Pre-Kindergarten Through University

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ABSTRACT

Professional development with teachers, whether they are in pre-K-12 schools or in higher education, creates opportunities for discussions among teachers and teacher educators about how to find spaces for creativity and the imagination within the structure of the Common Core State Standards, a set of national standards adopted on a state-by-state basis in the U.S. Two education faculty members and an education librarian from a large city university held workshops, bringing together university faculty in arts and humanities, science, mathematics and education, and pre-K-12 teachers to explore the potential for inquiry and creativity in the Common Core State Standards.

What do education faculty, arts and sciences faculty, pre-K-12 teachers, and school librarians have to teach each other about teaching and learning? How can we help each other find ways to make richly complex texts and ideas accessible to students who may struggle with basic skills?

With these questions in mind we, three faculty members from Lehman College's School of Education and Library, collaborated on a project for professional development that we hoped might spark a dialogue that could help educators consider ways they might bring inquiry and creativity into their classrooms.

In response to a Request for Proposals from the City University of New York (CUNY's) Professional Development and Common Core State Standards Alignment Initiative for Arts and Sciences Faculty, we designed a workshop series bringing together faculty

across disciplines and departments. Conscious of the Common Core's emphasis on "career and college readiness" in New York State (NYSED, n.d.), we wondered whether liberal arts and sciences faculty would see these standards as preparing students for college-level work. The workshop was broken into two sessions, taking place one week apart.

The project aimed to support Lehman College's Natural and Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, and Education faculty who work with teacher candidates and undergraduate students in finding opportunities for inquiry-based learning and creativity within the context of the Common Core State Standards. In particular, the project allowed participants to explore the use of inquiry-based learning as a tool in teaching complex texts and ideas and in developing students' ability to make evidence-based arguments.

Maxine Greene (1995) advocates for the role of the imagination in education as a way of "decentering ourselves" (p. 30) to remind us that education is not simply the acquisition of fact and skills, but a means of taking one's place in the world. As students are encouraged to question their own understanding, their teachers need to have the experience of immersion in the kinds of decentering experiences that can be the outgrowth of creative engagement.

Professional development at all levels, from early childhood to higher education, can help educators find opportunities to integrate artistic expression and multimodal literacies across the curriculum. It is essential that professional development workshops that ask teachers to consider the role of creativity in their work provide a safe space for such "decentering" experiences as Greene describes. We as college professors and teacher educators, in turn, need to help college students and teacher candidates find contexts for such experiences within the curriculum as we help them negotiate the constraints and the possibilities under which they function.

Some Background on the Common Core and Its Impact on Teaching and Learning

In this paper we will provide some background knowledge about the Common Core Standards and the impact they have had on teaching and learning in U.S. schools. As the standards movement in education has begun to develop international momentum, the challenges faced by American schools might be useful to consider in other contexts.

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This system of standards and assessments can trace its roots internationally to the United Kingdom's Thatcher administration, when the nation adopted a set of standards in 1988 to evaluate core competencies in reading, writing, and mathematics (Volante & Earl, 2013). According to the authors, policies mandating curriculum requirements and corresponding standardized tests have since been implemented in other European countries as well as North America, Australasia, and parts of Asia. Similar to the U.S., where standards have been adopted on a state-by-state basis, Canada's 10 provinces have implemented assessments by which schools are ranked and compared. The notable difference between the U.S. and Canada is that Canada mainly uses this data for the purpose of school improvement, rather than the American high-stakes tests that is used to evaluate student and teacher performance. In fact, a 2013 report by Action Canada refers to the role of standardized testing in the U.S., citing a study that found that, "70 percent of US school boards scaled back time on teaching subjects other than literacy and numeracy in order to improve test scores" (Despres, Kuhn, Ngirumpatse, & Parent, 2013, p. 10). The report recommends that Canada not allow testing to play as central a role in education as American schools have. Volante and Earl note the difference between the American and Canadian approaches to standards thusly: "For the most part, external test results are used to facilitate school improvement and do not carry high-stakes consequences for teachers or students in Canada" (2013).

The Common Core Standards (CCSS) were developed in response to the federal No Child Left Behind law and were adopted on a state-by-state basis in the U.S. The CCSS were published in the United States in 2010 and, as of this writing, have been adopted by 44 out of 50 states plus the District of Columbia. The standards established their primary goal as career and college readiness by emphasizing close reading of complex texts and evidence-based writing—habits of mind characteristic of many college curricula (Hess, 2012). As a result of a major federal funding incentive called Race to the Top, which was awarded to states willing to adopt common standards and the accompanying assessments developed in the following years, pre-K-12 schools are under pressure to prepare students for high-stakes tests in ELA and mathematics (Bowling & Pickerill, 2013; Porter, Fusarelli, & Fusarelli, 2015; Ujifusa, 2013).

The intention in developing Common Core Standards (2015) was to support "critical-thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills that are required for success in college, career, and life." The standards for reading literature in grades 6-12 demand "rigor" and "increasing complexity."¹ In service of these goals, the English Language Arts (ELA) standards were developed with an emphasis on reading non-fiction texts and writing evidence-based arguments. In many of the states in the U.S. that have adopted CCSS, this emphasis on reading non-fiction texts and writing evidence-based arguments is

reflected in high-stakes testing. Because these tests carry significant consequences for students, teachers, and schools, the enormous pressure to prepare students can leave little room for creative and imaginative work in the classroom. The consequence is a loss of creativity's essential contribution to higher level thinking that "demands connections, associations, linkages of conscious and unconscious elements, memory and emotion, past, present and future merging into the process of making meaning" (Sullivan, 2009, p. 121).

The intensive testing regime and demand from school administrations that teachers devote substantial amounts of time to preparing students for these tests means that there is little room in the school year for expressive writing or exploratory reading. In fact, the standards do not even value the experience of reading whole books. For one school administrator, explaining the Common Core's "critical shift" in school reading: "We look at teaching literature as teaching particular concepts and skills. So we maybe aren't teaching an entire novel, but we're ensuring that we're teaching the concepts that that novel would have gotten across" (Strauss, 2014).

The notion that teachers would choose for students what concepts a novel "would have gotten across," rather than allowing students to discover them unfolding through the course of reading a whole book as its author intended, seems antithetical to the CCSS's stated goal of career and college readiness, unless one's idea of college work is consistent with consuming predigested concepts, served out of context. The decision to only read excerpts, rather than whole books, seems to be an argument in favor of expediency that presumes that the teacher and the assigned, sanctioned curriculum are the sole delivery system for anything valuable that might happen in the classroom; as if reading a novel cover to cover were a frivolous waste of time as long as the "concepts" could be gotten across more efficiently. This top-down approach to teaching is the very antithesis of inquiry-based learning, in which students explore ideas through guided research, writing, and engagement in multimodal literacies.

The Common Core Standards and Inquiry-Based Learning

The language of the CCSS appears to promote teaching strategies consistent with inquiry. Kenna and Russell (2015) point to the large number of higher-order thinking verbs in the standards, which "suggest that student/learner-centered methods of instruction are favored over teacher-centered methods of instruction" (p. 29).

However, in one widely criticized teaching strategy video on the New York State website for the CCSS,² David Coleman, author of the ELA standards, offers a model for teaching Martin Luther King's seminal text, *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, which is rooted in the traditions of New Criticism (Sulzer, 2014), in which the meaning of a text lies solely in the words on the page and not in the understandings of the reader. This approach runs counter to the essence of inquiry-based teaching and learning. In Coleman's video, he eschews techniques such as activating students' prior knowledge and pre-reading strategies that would help situate readers for deep engagement with King's ideas. His recommendation that teachers read the first paragraph aloud to find the "argument King is pushing against" deals exclusively with the claim/counterclaim structure promoted in the Common Core writing standards, ignoring the social, cultural, and historical context for King's writing. This would be an excellent strategy to prepare students for tests that involve cold readings of challenging texts, but it does not promote engagement or ongoing inquiry into deeper ideas. The approach Coleman advocates in this video has a direct link to the CCSS's insistence on close reading which restricts itself to the words of the text and does not engage the students' background knowledge as critical reading would. It is representative of "a curriculum that de-emphasizes students' *worlds*," thus obstructing their "making sense of the *word*" (Ferguson, 2015). For Ferguson, as for Freire, "such obstruction is an act of oppression."

The demand for curriculum driven by high-stakes testing presents an obstacle for the kind of thoughtful engagement that characterizes inquiry-based learning (Cartwright & Noone, 2006). Educators, like Maxine Greene, concerned with critical literacy and social justice, have issued a call for educators to awaken their imagination and to teach between the cracks; creating spaces for nontraditional teaching and thinking, where students are allowed "to ask why" and "to think differently" (p. 2) and to feel comfortable with uncertainties. Authentic learning experiences require the learner to negotiate the meaning of new ideas and a broad range of texts in multiple forms through an ongoing process of inquiry (Pinhasi-Vittorio & Vernola, 2013). This form of inquiry encourages cognitive leaps; permitting learners to "imagine things as if they could be otherwise" (Greene, 2010). For Greene (1995), imagination is essential in education. She states: "of all our cognitive powers, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities. It allows us to break with the taken-for-granted, to set aside the familiar distinctions and definitions" (p. 3). Imagination and creativity are essential skill sets that might allow educators to support a broad range of learning needs and styles. "It provides a means of constructing a pedagogy which does not leave students demoralized, but rather provides them with a hopeful way" (Cartwright & Noone, 2006, p. 3) and leaves room for questions that ask: "what if," "why," and "how." Imaginative thinking and creativity are possible under the constraints of CCSS if we focus on the

aspects of the standards that encourage active engagement by students. It is frequently the case, however, that teachers report feeling unsupported in such endeavors by their administrators (Gulla, 2007). At such times, it is especially important to support teachers in their efforts to find room for inquiry within the constraints of the CCSS.

Our purpose in offering this professional development workshop series has been to find those meeting points between the standards that define the skills deemed necessary for career and college readiness and the agency fostered by student-driven inquiry.

Therefore while the CCSS limits approaches to complex reading material to the “four corners of the text” (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012), there is potentially room for a broad range of approaches to allow for individual readings that may enrich a student’s experience of a text in unpredictable ways that are unlikely to count on any test.

In an inquiry-based teaching and learning environment, the teacher models and facilitates the inquiry process. Inquiry demands that learners explore concepts embedded within the content being studied through open-ended questions. Teachers need to create the conditions that support developing scholarship through higher-order questions that ultimately lead to students forming their own questions (Wolf, 1987). This type of inquiry is a process that involves ongoing reciprocal interactions with content, with the classroom environment (Bakhtin, 1981), with peers (Vygotsky, 1978), and with teachers.

Although we are not advocating for the implementation of the CCSS, we are aware that it is the reality of public schools in New York State and, as such, we are compelled to find ways to find room for creativity and imagination while pushing the boundaries of thinking toward socially just practices. We made a conscious decision to center the workshop on interrogating the CCSS alongside an inquiry-based approach to learning. Our research questions focused on classroom practice and practitioners:

- What lessons might we be able to learn from pre-K-12 educators as they interpret and enact the CCSS?
- What role(s) can inquiry-based learning and creativity play in helping to prepare students for higher education and careers?

The professional development project provided a platform for faculty across disciplines to work on creative exploration of the use of inquiry-based learning as a tool in teaching complex texts and the development of evidence-based arguments

as called for in the CCSS English Language Arts (ELA) standards.³ Our purpose was to provide an opportunity for faculty members who would rarely have a chance to collaborate, to learn from each other. The intention was to create a dialogue amongst teacher educators and arts and sciences faculty about how they might use creative and imaginative approaches to enrich students' understanding of complex texts and ideas. This would also expose participants to a range of perspectives while reexamining the conventional approaches to reading, writing, and thinking within the traditions of their respective disciplines. Moreover, we encouraged faculty to share the various ways in which they seek to support students in engaging with challenging ideas and complex texts.

Inquiry Into Inquiry: The Workshop

Our two-part workshop consisted of an exploration of the nature of inquiry and text complexity. We also included a panel discussion of pre-K-12 educators sharing the ways that they incorporate creativity and inquiry into their teaching within the context of mandated standards and curricula.

Participants in our workshop included professors from the campus Library as well as from English, Psychology, Sociology, Chemistry, and Education departments. To situate the discussion, we asked participants to offer a visual representation of the practice of inquiry within their respective fields using physical gestures, poses, and expressions. These embodied representations moved our colleagues into the realm of nonverbal communication—a realm that is seldom explored among academic faculty, thereby providing an opportunity for the kind of “decentering” experience we sought. This activity led us into a lively discussion of the nature of inquiry and what it requires of them.

The group was divided into halves so that each half would have an opportunity to observe the other as they performed their gesture or movement representing “inquiry.” The observers were invited to look closely and identify what they noticed each person doing. We structured the activity to limit response strictly to observations and descriptions, forcing them to hold off on interpretations and analysis.

The range of movements, gestures, and facial expressions was wide. One participant noticed that a colleague made shaping or molding gestures, which were later interpreted as an effort to integrate, to make ideas cohere. Another observed someone

who was trying to fit pieces together to grasp the whole. Some gestures appeared playful while others seemed to express a struggle. Some turned their heads or hands inward in a gesture that suggested they were seeking isolation. For one, inquiry was social and the gesture seemed to encourage others to ask more questions.

The intention behind this activity was to thoroughly involve the participants in the exploration of inquiry through the use of bodily/kinesthetic knowledge. As academics we are so used to being disembodied thinkers, talkers, and writers that we seldom afford ourselves the benefit of exploring an idea through the lens of physical movement, using body and gesture to create metaphors for our experiences. Through involvement of the body, we open the door to imaginative learning that goes beyond the text-based approach of the CCSS and indeed most academic work. Allowing the time to be in the role of the participants and, thereafter, observer, stimulated their curiosity and positioned them in a teacher-researcher mode rooted in an ethnographic approach. Looking at the physical manifestations of individual inquiry stances provided rich language to launch the discussion, making the interpretation and analysis more meaningful than it would have been otherwise.

The focus of the discussion shifted to the topic of inquiry within the various academic disciplines represented in the room. A chemistry professor opened the discussion by diagramming the scientific inquiry process on the white board: starting with a claim (hypothesis), testing the claim (deduction), criticism, and then analysis. A literacy professor came up to the white board and replaced deduction with induction, which is typical of inquiry in his field. An artist in our group started inquiry with observation. Inquiry involved stepping back and letting go of preconceived ideas and biases, looking at things from different angles. An English professor remarked that the shape of inquiry may be rambling and tentative, rather than linear or neat. It may spiral and have an iterative quality as it moves from the unclear to clarity. This process could take place when studying any kind of object or being. One teacher educator talked about inquiry into student learning and the need to model questioning as a practice.

Inquiry may also be a way of being in the world, and in the classroom, one that involves observation, curiosity, questioning, and wonder. A counselor educator commented that inquiry is the desire to know, humbly noting that there is a need to know more. For a psychology professor, inquiry is ongoing and active. A science educator stated that inquiry is not neat or complete, and the chemistry professor agreed that there are always more questions at the end of the cycle.

This exploration of inquiry as a practice, and as a stance, set us up for the next phase of the workshop—inquiry into a complex text. Our idea was to examine the professors' own notions about what constitutes a complex text in various contexts and consider what strategies they use to support their students in understanding complex texts in their courses. The CCSS have a great deal to say about text complexity.⁴ We looked at our colleagues' practices alongside approaches to text complexity as they are described within the CCSS.

Text Complexity and Argument

One of the questions that arose for us as we designed the workshop was whether there would be agreement about the characteristics that identified a text as complex. We also wondered about the range of strategies faculty members in various disciplines used to address the challenges their college students might face in reading complex texts. A search of the New York State CCSS website reveals this sentence regarding the importance of text complexity: "As a result of CCSS-aligned instructions, Students will readily undertake the close, attentive reading that is at the heart of understanding and enjoying complex works of literature" (NYSED, 2012b). The authors of the CCSS recommend a mix of quantitative and qualitative measures including the Lexile level to determine the degree of a given text's complexity. Early in the workshop we asked participants to describe the characteristics of a complex text. We began by asking a four-part question:

What is a complex text?

What makes a text complex for you?

What makes a text complex for your students?

What makes a text complex in your field?

Here were some of their responses:

- Texts with multiple layers of meaning may not unfold all at once (e.g., music—not a pop song, you need to hear it many times to get it).
- There is a density of material. The big picture of why you need to know all these details often gets lost. The text contains jargon.
- Complex texts may be layered and highly abstract, often dense. Requires prerequisite text, prior knowledge.

- The text may seem abstract. The reader's background knowledge is not there.
- Theoretical perspective may not be apparent or may be latent.
- Can we separate the complex text from the knowledge presented?
- A text may be complex without being dense or wordy if the ideas it contains are complex.

The participants' comments about complex texts—that they are layered, may be non-linear, and require some background to understand—suggest an approach to reading these texts that values multiple layers of questioning, ample time for engagement, and bringing prior knowledge to bear—an approach that is markedly different from the one Coleman suggests. In short, we had set the stage to explore a model of inquiry in support of reading complex texts.

In preparation for the workshop, we had asked participants to come prepared with a specific challenging text from a course they taught. In their small groups, they shared these texts and talked about strategies they use in their classes to support students when they had difficulty comprehending the readings.

At the end of the first day of the workshop, each group chose one of the approaches to aiding student comprehension, and worked together to construct an argument with a clear claim in support of the instructional approach. Following the guidelines of the 8th Grade Common Core State Standard ELA Curriculum regarding the construction of an argument, the participants also needed to include a counterclaim to their argument (NYSED, 2012a). It appeared that the participants were deeply invested in the activities. There was laughter and lively discussion as they worked diligently in their groups. As each group presented its arguments and counterclaims, we were struck that all of these professors from a wide range of disciplines took responsibility for supporting their students as readers. Rather than insist that the responsibility of understanding the reading material lay solely with the students, each faculty member had thoughtfully considered strategies to scaffold the reading.

Following the group presentations of their arguments in support of strategies for teaching complex texts, we asked them to present their arguments in a different form than they had previously; we wanted to engage the participants in imaginative thought to open up different venues of conceptualizing ideas. The stress was on thinking of a non-conventional way to present their argument. We hoped that experiencing the

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embodiment exercises during the workshop might have primed them to think outside of the scholarly box and consider alternative ways of viewing an argument and complex text. We stressed that it was not important which form they used as long as they were able to share their claims in a different mode than their original presentation. The participants worked with their groups during the week between the first and second sessions, getting ready to present their claims and counterclaims.

The subsequent week, the four groups presented their arguments. Although three of the four groups wrote original poetry as the vehicle for presenting their argument, each group used its poems in unique ways.

The first group distributed paper frames of varying sizes and asked us to look around the room and to comment on how the frame focused our observations. The use of the frame was a visual metaphor for the group's claim that students need the teacher's help in focusing on the key ideas within a text. One of the professors then read an original humorous poem called *Night Falls on the Forest of Imaginings*, which expressed the panic of "ivory tower newbies" when they "trek into the forest of imaginings" and experience grotesque consequences when confronted with a text whose complexity exceeds their capacity. The poet in this group used a series of ever-more alarming metaphors to suggest the feeling of being lost in a forest of words:

*The tendrils of creeping vines grow, not slowly,
winding about our limbs and necks as if caught
between a decidedly Kantian synthetic statement
and a Marxian dialectic contradiction in itself.
Three more classmates gone, devoured by the void.
We run! No—we hobble deeper into the forest.*

The dramatic imagery cast a comical light on the students' anxiety, ending with this plea, evoking the familiar image of the beleaguered student lost in the forest of academic jargon:

*We're freshman art majors!
We didn't want this! Can't we just ask Google?*

The second set of presenters argued for the value of looking at complex texts in small groups. Unlike the first group, which used the forest as an intricate metaphor for students' reading complex texts, the second group composed a simpler, more straightforward poem about useful approaches to studying complex texts. The main

presenter of that group prefaced her reading with an apology for her skills as a poet. Another participant said that it felt awkward and strange to think outside the box. Moments like this encourage empathy for our students who are often in this position.

The third group presented a poem that argued for the importance of providing a purpose for reading prior to handing out a text. One of the presenters commented that the process of writing the poem helped to clarify the claim for which they were arguing.

The fourth group used a music video by the legendary Nigerian Afro beat musician Fela Kuti to serve as its complex text. It provided readings and a video to illustrate the value of historical context in understanding a complex text, to illuminate the complexity of the music. The group pointed out that understanding the political content of Fela's music requires listening multiple times and the support of contextual information.

In all presentations, participants expressed that by using creative approaches to present an argument they were pushed to explore a claim, rather than asserting and supporting it—facilitating the line of questioning. Rather than proving their claims, there was an acknowledgement that inquiry often raises more questions than answers. It further pushed them to think of their argument in a different way, as they reexamined it and present it in an unorthodox manner. This process sets the stage for socially just practices and furthers inquiry as it opens participants up to dialogue with alternative perspectives. Once the higher education faculty had been steeped in a discussion of the CCSS, we felt it was important for them to hear the perspective of pre-K-12 educators.

The Panel Discussion

The panel consisted of three educators with a broad range of experiences in schools. Diana Behan is a recently retired birth-12 teacher, reading specialist, literacy coach, and adjunct instructor in the Literacy Studies Graduate Program; Michael Dodes is a high school Library Information Specialist; and Molly Sherman is a high school English and ESL teacher in an international high school with a student population of recent immigrants from all over the world. The three panelists were each asked to talk about the realities of finding room for inquiry and creativity within the CCSS (Behan, Dodes, & Sherman, 2014).

Each of the panelists shared strategies they had used to deepen their students' understanding of complex texts. These included writing poems in response to

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non-fiction articles, staging debates about the motivations of characters in stories, and teaching research and inquiry methods. As a result of these techniques, students' writing and their thinking improved, and their test results confirmed that real understanding of a text often goes beyond its four corners. One panelist described the challenges of sometimes having to create room for creative and imaginative work within the limitations of scripted curricula.

Workshop participants were eager to ask questions of the pre-K-12 panelists about the reality in schools as well as what higher education faculty can expect from Common Core educated students. The faculty wondered if it could expect different skills from college students in the future. The Library, Arts and Humanities, and Science professors, as well as teacher educators, were eager to learn from the panelists what they might do to empower new teachers to integrate inquiry and creativity in their teaching within the framework of the CCSS.

We started the workshop with activities that “decentered” the participants and drew upon their creativity and imagination. Discussions pushed the boundaries and raised possibilities for inquiry and creativity within the constraints of the Common Core. Participants enjoyed the activities and experimented with new terms and new ways of thinking, viewing, and teaching. When the three guest speakers presented their own daily realities of finding room for creativity within the Common Core, our colleagues were hit full force with the challenges of working within these often oppressive confines. Upon reflection, we realized that if we had placed the guest speakers at the beginning of the workshop, the participants would have had time to consider the constraints described by the pre-K-12 panelists and to explore the creative ways of teaching between the cracks.

Discussion (Findings)

Looking back at the professional development and examining the data, we came across three threads that were supported by the evidence; 1) The language of the CCSS appears to promote inquiry, but the reality of the implementation does not support that approach; 2) Some teachers do find room for inquiry and creativity, but it is very challenging; and 3) Creative thinking and embodiment can help learners gain more insight into an idea or an argument.

1. The language of the CCSS appears to promote inquiry, but the reality of the implementation does not support that approach.

When the panel of seasoned teachers and a librarian presented its work (Behan et al., 2014), Sherman talked about the teachers' fear of losing their jobs unless they followed the standards and so they didn't take risks with their teaching. Behan supported Sherman's point, centering on the younger age of her students, when she used a scripted curriculum that provided readings that were too complex for the reading level of young children. In response, Dodes talked about wanting to develop readers—trying to ensure that books that he recommended were at an appropriate level of complexity to meet the needs of each student.

Continuing the discussion of text material, Sherman asserted the need to find multiple articles on the topic of immigration for her students because the published packets of articles provided by the school were not engaging and contextually rich enough for her students. In each case, the teachers and librarians sought out resources that would be of high interest to their students and might ignite their passion for learning. These materials were selected to support each student's individual inquiry.

2. Some teachers do find room for inquiry and creativity, but it is very challenging.

The participants in the workshop agreed that seasoned teachers with tenure are in a better position in taking risks and “subversively” including inquiry and creativity. Yet, in order to do so, teachers need to know the Common Core very well so that they can defend their teaching practices with the school administration. The growing concern is about new teachers who are lost and feel pressured to follow the standards to the fullest. This pressure comes top down from state officials, administrators, district supervisors, principals, teachers, and eventually is felt by the students. When teachers feel supported in school, and know that there is room and tolerance for different types of teaching and learning, they can then be available to engage their students in authentic learning.

3. Creative thinking and embodiment can help learners gain more insight into an idea or an argument.

Several of the workshop participants commented that finding different modalities for expressing their ideas deepened their understanding and made the experience memorable.

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If we can recognize that all of us have different ways of defining research, inquiry, learning, text complexity, as well as different modalities in expressing these concepts, we will be open to different instructional styles to address the needs of a broad range of learners.

The creative process is integral to inquiry-based learning. Unlike Coleman's stance that understanding of the text can be gained by "following the details," we contend, like Louise Rosenblatt (1978), that the "poem exists in a transaction between the reader and the text" (p. 100). Such transactions demand that readers bring their own histories and understandings into their readings in order to make the text come alive. De-centering approaches, such as the ones modeled in this workshop series, invite multiple perspectives that can deepen understanding of texts. Furthermore, an embodied understanding gained through writing and/or art making allows the learner to reason through the problem in a way that does not occur in the process of "close reading" as Coleman performs it. For Coleman, the meaning resides completely within the text and not within the reader. Our intention in having participants incorporate creativity into the presentation of their arguments in support of strategies for teaching complex texts was to have them consider the argument from a different angle, "to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard, and unexpected" (Greene, 1995, p. 28).

Professional development workshops, if structured in a way that encourages open dialogue and questioning, provide opportunities for educators to share resources and to support each other. Following the workshop, several faculty members discussed ways in which they might incorporate some of the strategies they had learned into their courses. An art education professor told us that she was inspired to try the contextual activity that she observed around Fela Kuti to enhance the reading of Maxine Greene's work in her methods class. The chemistry professor mentioned that he wanted to introduce more writing into his class, which was inspired by a conversation with another workshop participant. One participant expressed a desire to offer different ways of presenting the same lesson depending upon the needs of the students, and another planned to use more collaborative and mixed-media work in class.

It is our hope that this workshop series has sparked an interdisciplinary conversation about finding the possibilities for inquiry and creativity in teaching that will continue to inform all of our work with students from pre-K through graduate school.

Notes

1. Please see <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/introduction-for-6-12/>
2. Please see www.engageny.org
3. Please see <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/>
4. Please see <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/standard-10-range-quality-complexity/measuring-text-complexity-three-factors/>

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Push, Pull and Nudge: The Future of Teaching and Educational Change

Andy Hargreaves

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws on recent research on teacher collegiality and professional learning communities to unpack the nature, benefits and drawbacks of different forms of collegial relations, especially in circumstances of high stakes reform. In particular the paper examines the relative merits of pulling change by inspiring and enthusing teachers in their efforts by appeal to the moral principles of their work, or pushing change by placing teachers in situations requiring changes in practice in the hope that this will then lead to changes in their beliefs. The paper finds that teachers sometimes have to be drawn or pulled into professional learning communities, and sometimes they have to be driven or pushed by them. However, pulling should not be so weak that it permits no collaboration at all, and pushing should not be so excessive that it amounts to shoving or bullying. Instead, collaboration will often require the nudges of deliberate arrangements to enhance learning.

Introduction

For thousands of years, teaching was a practice conducted by individuals in relation to other individuals or entire multitudes. Buddha, Mohammed, Moses and Jesus; Confucius in the East, and Socrates in the West

– all these founders of great spiritual, philosophical and cultural traditions were iconic and charismatic teachers – they purveyed wisdom, conveyed knowledge and sometimes inveighed against social convention and intellectual complacency. They told inspiring stories, posed probing questions, and presented life insights through conundrums and riddles – challenging those who wanted to learn from them at every step. They were teachers who had teachings, and the teachings were supposed to be followed, even if that entailed finding a path for oneself.

If teachers and those who judge them regard the work of teaching as being an essentially hierarchical and individual act – in historical, philosophical and even spiritual terms – they have therefore come by it honestly. They are part of a respectable and revered tradition that stretches back more than two Millennia.

Challenges to the traditional and, many have thought, unavoidably hierarchical nature of the teacher-pupil relationship (Waller 1932), have been prominent during particular historical periods. These include the Progressive Movements of the 1920s and 1930s following World War I in the US, UK, Germany and other parts of Europe; the economically expansionist and culturally questioning era of the 1960s and early 1970s in both the West and parts of Asia; and now, once more, a turn away from teaching to learning, and standardized instruction to personalized learning in the internet age of independent online access and participation in social media in the twenty-first century.

More recent than the historically repeated attempts to transform teaching from hierarchical transmission to facilitation, from authority to authenticity, and from classroom hierarchy to democracy, has been a systematic and sustained assault on the culture and even the cult of teacher individualism. This assault has challenged the second deep-seated idea that teaching is an act performed alone, as an individual, in isolation from all other teachers in the vicinity (Little 1990; Rosenholtz 1991).

If professional collaboration in talking about teaching, planning teaching and performing teaching together was at first an ideal or even an ideology, over the past 20 years, there has been an accumulating body of evidence that professional collaboration which is related to student learning, produces better learning outcomes, improves teacher retention and brings about more successful implementation of change, than teaching which is conducted mainly in isolation from other teachers (Hargreaves 1994; Newmann and Wehlage 1995).

This has led to widespread efforts to design and even dictate specific architectures of collaboration in the form of what are called professional learning communities

which redefine expectations for the work of teaching and the profession of teaching in order to improve learning outcomes for students and to implement change successfully within the system (Hord 1997; McLaughlin and Talbert 2001). In many countries, the institution of professional learning communities is redefining the form and the future of teaching as a job that is performed, or at least planned and reviewed collectively and transparently, so there is little left in teaching and learning that is private. Key data about pupil behaviour and performance are increasingly accessible to and analyzed by professional colleagues in real time to trigger just-in-time interventions for students and also to manage and monitor implementation of reform.

This paper analyzes the nature and dynamics of professional collaboration in an age of increasingly data-driven, large-scale, standards-based reform – where improved learning outcomes for students and incessant attention to reform implementation sit in an uneasy relationship beside one another and are each subsumed by the same technology of professional learning communities. In order to do this, the paper revisits and revises a concept I created two decades ago – *contrived collegiality* – and then investigates how this concept or the process it refers to plays out within the modern context of professional learning communities. It argues against securing increased professional collaboration through strategies of administrative force on the one hand, or voluntaristic freedom of choice on the other. Against these extremes, it counterposes, but also critiques, a strategy of developing professional collaboration or professional learning communities, through a combination of pushing, pulling and nudging professional peers in the direction of desired change that benefits students without undermining teachers' professionalism. In making the argument, the paper draws on recent investigations I have conducted with various colleagues on professional collaboration in high performing educational systems across the world in Europe, North America and Asia as well as organizations in other sectors (Hargreaves and Braun 2012; Hargreaves and Shirley 2012; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012).

Arranged Collegiality

Some years ago, I was invited to dinner with a group of principals in Australia. Midway through the main course, one of the principals said, "Do you mind if I ask some advice?" He described problems he was having with a teacher who refused to collaborate, even though, paradoxically, the dissertation the teacher had recently completed for his graduate degree was on professional collaboration. When asked to give some examples, the principal said:

"Well, at the start of staff meetings, we usually begin with an ice-breaking activity, and he refuses to do it".

Back came the probing question. "How long have you been at your school?" "What are the relationships among the other teachers like?"

"Actually, they're very good. I've been there a few years and we have worked a lot together. The trust levels are really high".

"So perhaps there's no ice to break, then!" came my reply.

"That's funny", the principal said. "You may be right. He keeps accusing me of this thing... What does he call it? Contrived collegiality!"

"I have bad news for you" I responded. "I invented the term!"

It is one thing to value professional collaboration as an ideal. It is another to be able to develop and enact a theory of change that will bring desired levels and forms of collaboration into being. Should teachers be encouraged to collaborate then be left alone to do it themselves? Or, if the benefits are so great for students, should they be forced to collaborate, even if it does not suit their own professional needs and styles as adults?

In educational change, it is sometimes said that human beings, like physical objects, usually prefer to be at rest: to remain just where they are. In line with the laws of physics, some kind of force will therefore be required to move them. What kind of force should it be, and who should exert it? Should teachers be pushed, pulled, dragged, drawn or lifted? Is a great shove needed to move them forward and keep doing so, or will just a small nudge be enough to get them moving by their own momentum?

Collaboration is a particularly challenging goal for change efforts. Cultures of professional collaboration don't evolve quickly. They depend on the proof of repeated interactions that establish a foundation of respect and trust (Nias 1989; Datnow and Park 2012; Finnigan et al. in press). The time required to build authentic collaborative relationships to which people make willing commitments can be unattractive to administrators who seek swift solutions or are driven by their systems to produce short-term results.

Not only do collaborative cultures take time, but they can also be unpredictable in their consequences. The curriculum that will be developed, the learning that will be fostered, the innovations that will be created, cannot be planned or predicted exactly in advance. For some administrators, this unpredictability can be disconcerting. What is developed by these collaborative cultures may not always correspond to administrators' own preferences or current reform priorities. Just as votes in an election can go against you, so can collaborative cultures. So administrators often prefer forms

of collegiality that they feel they can control – meetings with a predetermined agenda, working groups you can list on paper, or data teams that produce specific results. These more regulated kinds of collaboration are what I have termed *contrived collegiality* (Hargreaves 1994).

Contrived collegiality is characterized by formal, specific bureaucratic procedures to increase the attention being given to joint teacher planning and other forms of working together. It can be seen in initiatives like peer coaching, mentoring schemes, data-driven team meetings and inquiry projects. These administrative contrivances can get collegiality going in schools where little or none existed before. They are meant to encourage greater association among teachers and to foster more sharing, learning and improvement of skills and expertise. They are a way to nudge new kinds of interactions and relationships into existence.

In their widely used book *Nudge: improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness*, Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein (2008) argue against two flawed theories of change that underpin many administrative and policy efforts to alter behaviour. Except where it is absolutely necessary and the protection of public safety is at risk, they argue, attempts to alter behaviour by the first strategy of compulsion or force usually backfire in generating resistance to and avoidance of change. We have seen this, for example, in models of policy delivery where standardized tests or other key performance indicators are linked to high-stakes system targets for improvement with punitive consequences for those who fall short. In education, health, policing and even management of railways, high speed pressure for measurable improvement provides employees with “perverse incentives” to teach to the test or concentrate undue attention on pupils very close to the passing mark in education, to redefine certain crimes as misdemeanours in policing in order to give the appearance of improved crime rates, to reduce or eliminate safety checks in order to meet the schedules of railway construction or repair, and to drive dangerously ill patients in an ambulance round and round their hospital until the emergency room waiting time within the hospital will be short enough to meet the government target (Bird et al. 2005). Force drives people to game the system and produce the appearance of compliance, even and including when force is applied to requirements for professional collaboration.

The opposite of overwhelming force is unlimited choice. This too, say the authors of *Nudge*, is a detrimental option. In *The Paradox of Choice*, Barry Schwartz (2005) argues and shows that too much choice can be bad for us. It makes us confused, frustrated and unhappy, because out of all the options available, we can never be truly sure we have made the right or completely the best choice – be this shoes for our feet or

schools for our children. More than this, say Thaler and Sunstein, when consumers are overwhelmed, they will often make choices, or fail to make choices in ways that are bad for them – especially when the results of those choices are long term and can easily be overshadowed by other choices that yield short-term rewards. This, they say, is why people often choose to purchase and consume foods that are bad for their health, or why they fail to review their pension fund investments to safeguard their long term retirement.

What the authors of *Nudge* argue for instead of inescapable force and unlimited choice is ways to “nudge” or prod people’s choices in one direction rather than another, reducing the range of choice and increasing the probability that people will then choose the behaviours that are in the best interests of themselves or those they serve. Some of these nudges are normative: they are in the language we use and the expectations we set. Others are structural: they are arrangements of the organizational or physical environment to make some choices more likely than others. Placing fruit rather than sweets or candy bars next to the supermarket checkout, shifts the likelihood of what people will buy, on impulse, as they line up to pay. Making the best rather than worst pension option the default option for those who don’t actively choose, again instigates a structure that channels people’s own choices into more beneficial areas, rather than harmful ones. Nudging, say Thaler and Sunstein, isn’t meant to be a way to deceive consumers, or hoodwink people into harming themselves. It is a way to deliberately organize and arrange the structures and norms of organizations to increase personal benefit and public good.

When nudging is applied to cultivating collaborative behaviour, this is one way in which we might use the term, *contrived collegiality*, though in this benign sense, after Norwegian scholar Kirsti Klette (1997), I prefer to call it *arranged collegiality*. Arranged collegiality is a way of putting teachers in contact with each other. Principals and peers can then build on resulting elements of recognition, trust and support to focus conversations and activity more tightly around teaching and learning.

Arranged collegiality is evident in shrewd scheduling that releases the right people to have an opportunity to plan together, within a grade level or across departments, perhaps. Principals can use their own time to cover classes and facilitate this planning. Putting the new teacher and an experienced and accomplished colleague in adjacent classrooms is another way to nudge forward a process of informal mentoring. Arrangements and expectations can be established for special education teachers to meet with regular classroom teachers and work with them in their own classrooms. Protocols can be written where teachers can examine students’ work in their respective

classes. These kinds of arrangements make it more likely (though not certain) that high-trust collaborative cultures will develop.

What people believe and how people behave (the *substance* of a culture) is, in other words, profoundly affected by their connections to and subsequent relationships with who does or doesn't believe it (the *form* of a culture). Change the *form* of a culture (the interactions among people) through the medium of arranged collegiality and you have a good chance of changing its content too (Hargreaves 1994). Take the case of special education in Ontario, Canada.

Barry Finlay was a quarterback in university and went on to play five years in the Canadian Football League (CFL). A quarterback must see the relationships among all the players on the field. He's the systems thinker of football. Towards the end of his athletic career, Barry started getting involved in coaching young men who others had found challenging in terms of their discipline or behavior. He enjoyed working with them, empathized with them and felt he made a difference to these youngsters who hadn't really fit in anywhere else. Barry was now a systems thinker with a moral purpose and a mission.

Barry's teaching experience led him into special education – with kids on the margins who needed some learning support and guidance in their life. Moving on to take his Masters degree in Educational Administration, he focused on organizational learning and on how everything was connected to everything else in the big picture of change. As a principal of a new innovative high school, Barry then became a systems thinker in action. He organized teaching in Grades 9 and 10 so that students were shared mainly among four teachers, who taught as teams, knew what each other was doing and grasped where all the program was. When substitute teachers came in, for example, they weren't just babysitters, but they slotted right in to the whole team. They were now big picture thinkers too. They all understood how the school worked and what their own contribution was. His effective use of arranged collegiality enabled everyone to see and be responsible for the big picture of school change.

Eventually, Barry became Director of Special Education for the whole of his province. Here was his chance to apply his systems thinking to his passion for special education and for supporting all learners. One of his first moves, against some opposition, was to move his office from a separate building, marginalized from the Ministry offices, into the main building itself. If he was outside the mainstream, he reasoned, how could he persuade districts and schools to make special education part of the mainstream themselves? He realized that if he wanted to change people's beliefs about special education, he had to change the relationships and interactions between special education and other personnel – and he realized this had to start right at the top, with himself and his colleagues.

Barry knew how children with special educational needs had often been separated out from other children – “withdrawn” from classes, taught in separate units or distant portable classrooms far away from the rest of the school. Barry presided over a new provincial philosophy that believed that what was essential for some children was good for all of them – that if you wanted to help children with special educational needs, you had to transform the whole school. Special education teachers worked in teams and in classrooms with regular classroom teachers. They developed senses of shared responsibility for the same

children and their progress. Special education teachers started to help all children who found parts of their learning difficult; not just the ones who had been formally identified as having special educational needs. And in school district offices, special education and curriculum departments began to work more closely together – sometimes becoming almost indistinguishable from each other. All this helped promote the philosophy and practices across the system where whole-school changes like providing differentiated instruction or offering assistive or enhancing technologies for all students, particularly benefited those who had identified disabilities.

Barry Finlay grasped that if you want to change people's practices and beliefs, you have to alter or arrange patterns of communication and build new kinds of relationships among them. This may involve changing people's roles or changing the structures of an organization – but the goal is to *reculture* schools, districts and whole systems so they serve all their children better.

Arranged collegiality can therefore instigate new cultures and relationships of a more collaborative kind, through establishing common norms, creating a common language and placing people in closer proximity to each other in order to develop senses of shared responsibility. At the same time, arranged collegiality can also disturb collective complacency or groupthink and extend what teachers collaborate about.

Contrived Collegiality

By looking at achievement data, examining learning profiles of particular students, or comparing how different teachers might assess examples of students' assignments, arranged collegiality can also sharpen the focus of joint work among teachers (Datnow 2011). However, there is a fine line between *arranged* collegiality and *contrived* collegiality.

Cultures of professional collaboration take much more time, care and sensitivity than speedily implemented changes or hurriedly assembled teams allow. Arranged collegiality can prod and nudge this process forward by creating opportunities, incentives and also expectations for teachers to work together, but there are still no quick fixes. Arranged collegiality, however, certainly does not mandate collegial support and partnership through fear and force. When arranged collegiality turns into more questionable contrived collegiality, collegueship and partnership are administratively imposed, creating a degree of inflexibility that violates the discretionary judgment that

is central to teacher professionalism. Let's consider two such examples of imposed or contrived collegiality:

1. Coaching

The first comes from research on peer coaching by a former graduate student, Jane Skelton (Hargreaves and Skelton 2011). Peer coaching relationships where one teacher assists one or more fellow teachers to improve their teaching or learn a new skill can take many different forms – some more empowering than others. Some of these don't just encourage teachers to work together on improvements they identify, but mandate that they work together to implement prescribed programs with *fidelity*.

Here is a US literacy coach and some teachers discussing their struggles in using mandated common planning time so that special education teachers could respond to short vignettes about their work with a prescribed vocabulary curriculum. The coach's job is to steer an agenda related to the district's goals within a mandated common planning period, but where there is shortage of time more generally.

Coach: *I struggle with having to get the conversation going. Sometimes I feel like I say a lot. I do a lot of "okay." Time is always the constraint. It's always the big factor. I've always struggled with what are the questions you have to bring forth in the moment to get things going. You don't want to say too much. You don't want to say too little.*

Teacher 2: *There's a point where if you try to do so much you don't get anything done. I understand the time constraints, but I'd rather come out with a little bit of information that I really know and I can really use. I'm more into the concrete.*

Coach: *Getting other folks to talk – that's my struggle. I feel pressures to have other folks speak. So I feel like I say too much up front. [I'm] just trying to get other folks to speak. (Almost all of the teachers nodded in agreement.)*

Time is not the only problem here. Teachers have to deal with many other initiatives and everyday demands such as "kids coming down the hallway" or parents waiting for attention, as well as the literacy requirements, and because of budget cuts, they are not even sure they will be keeping their jobs or where they will be working the following year.

- Teacher 7: *When we come in here, we have to switch off from that other stuff. We know it's Word Generation, and [we have to] focus on what we're doing.*
- Teacher 1: *We have so many team meetings. We're at the service of the parents and if the parents come, it's just a matter of us being in two places at once.*
- Teacher 4: *You have common planning time, you have cluster time, and there's no real sacredness to it. So everything comes before it, and you're flying by the seat of your pants. And, you sit down for a couple of minutes and you want to participate and you find yourself, like everybody else, waiting for the kids to be coming back from gym. So you can never really be relaxed.*
- Teacher 3: *And then with this year and everyone trying to figure out their job, our minds are in different places.*
- Teacher 4: *Finding work.*
- Teacher 2: *The [writing prompts] still have to be corrected.*
- Coach: *About coming from one place to the next – [the common planning time] tends to be very coach-driven. I think that there are places where I try to invite, but I think that folks feel overloaded with what they are trying to do outside of these meetings. I know that we had talked about questions (related to the vocabulary issues) and a couple of folks had brought them back. You get caught up in things. And so when you think about doing that collaborative piece...I mean, they had a parent show up this morning. They had an [individual education plan] meeting this morning. And I feel lots of times, it's like, "Can you handle this so we can deal with the parent and go to the [individual education plan] meeting? And kind of bring it back together for us week by week so that we can remain focused. (The teachers were silent.)*
- Teacher 2: *I think that it's hard to get a format that would fit every meeting like this – professional development meetings, curriculum-based meeting[s]. Personalities have a huge part of it. No matter what you have in front of you, like – "This is the manual for it, and we're going to follow this". Forget it. It's not going to happen, because people are different. [They] react to each other differently. They react to the coach differently and vice versa.*

Coaching in the context of mandated reform can often fall short of its ideals, therefore, leading to hurried, anxious and one-sided interactions, in required time periods that draw teachers away from compelling classroom concerns in a system where even basic job security can no longer be counted on. This is what, some years ago, I described in terms of "coaching as unreflective practice" (Hargreaves and Dawe 1990). Passive resistance results in the form of withholding full attention or not responding to the coach's requests to complete a survey on what students are learning.

It is easy to argue that teachers are just dragging their feet in acquiring new and much needed technical *skills*. But in this case, they are actually digging in their heels to assert a contrary *will* that opposes the enforced transportation of unwanted programs and practices into their classrooms, especially at a time when their very jobs are up in the air.

2. Peer Pressure

Peer pressure of certain kinds can be a highly valuable ingredient of positive professional collaboration – when peers who are knowledgeable about your practice, and share your instructional goals, help you and even push you to be the best you can be through processes of what are called cognitive coaching and challenge coaching that provide feedback that will deepen reflection, provoke inquiry and question existing assumptions. Writers such as Michael Fullan have argued that shifting the pressure exerted by those at the top, to pressure exerted by peers – what he calls positive peer pressure – is one of the most significant transformative changes that can occur in educational change (Fullan 2011). Yet this perhaps misrepresents the change question as being one of *who* controls change, rather than *how* change is controlled. A literacy coach, we have seen, can be just as pushy as a principal. Whether it is leaders or teachers who exert pressure to collaborate is not the point. The more important argument is what that pressure looks like and whether it amounts to a nudge or a shove. Nudging is an act of collegial encouragement. Shoving can border on professional abuse.

Sometimes, peer coaching can be just another technical way to implement an external mandate – with peer coaches or system literacy coaches now acting as messengers of compliance with enforced external reforms. An interesting example of this kind of peer-mediated accountability comes from an example of peer-driven change in Ontario, Canada, described by McKinsey & Co. To quote directly:

This is the story of a teacher who joined a primary school that had established the routines of collaborative practice as part of its literacy and numeracy strategy – these were professional learning communities through which teachers jointly reviewed student work and developed teaching methods. In that teacher's first week in the new school two of his colleagues visited him and suggested that he should use word walls because they had both found them to be effective. When, two weeks later, he had not yet put up the word walls, his colleagues visited him again, this time urging him more strongly to put up the word walls, sitting him down to share why this was the practice in their school and the difference it had made for students. A few weeks later, by then well into the school term, he had still not put up the word walls. His colleagues stopped by again after school, this time simply saying: "we are here to put up your word walls and we can help you to plan how to use them". As professionals in that school, they had developed a model of instruction that

they found effective....so they expected others to use it too. Their commitment was to all students and to their professional norms – not just to their own students in their own classrooms – and they were willing to hold each other accountable for practices that they found effective. (Mourshed et al. 2010)

What are we to make of this example? We hear the triumphant account from the peers who pushed their incoming colleague, but there are no words as to how this process was experienced by the colleague in question, or whether he became a better teacher as a result. It's a somewhat self-congratulatory account by the pushers, not the pushed. We don't know how well these peers know, understand and have got to grips with the details of their colleague's practice, but we do hear about infrequent visits and contacts – "two weeks later" and "a few weeks later" – suggesting that these may have had some of the features of drive-by observations that are all too common in many coaching, supervision and evaluation situations. Then there is the question of whether these educators see themselves truly as professional peers at all if they can take it upon themselves to be "sitting him down". This is more of a shove than a nudge and is very different from teachers and leaders in high performing Finland, for example, who work together as peers in a "society of experts" (Hargreaves et al. 2008). And we don't hear about the approaches to literacy that this teacher already uses, whether they are effective or not, and how rich or not they might be. All we know is whether or not the teacher has a word wall – an easily observable item, torn out of context, that can be quickly ticked off a checklist by transient and micromanaging peers armed with clipboards in their quest for compliance.

Of course, it's perfectly possible that these peers did have deep understandings of and engagements with their colleague's practice and that the use of a word wall was just one well articulated part of all this. But we hear none of this. In this case, as in too many cases, it simply seems to come down to whether or not the teacher has a word wall: an example of contrived collegiality at its pushiest, most superficial and groupthink-like extreme. And in the way the example is presented by McKinsey & Co, it uses the admirable principle of positive pressure to issue a license to exert any kind of pressure that the pushers decide on.

Some critics of the concept of contrived collegiality (which they often misread and misrepresent as contrived *congeniality*) wrongly claim that it is being used as a verbal weapon to defend teachers' right to teach any way they like (to shore up their individual classroom autonomy, that is) (Dufour 2011). As the arguments above make very clear, nothing could be further from the truth. But the principle that collegiality usually has to be organized, expected and *arranged* – often (but not always) by administrators

– should not be used to justify and to fail to challenge the excesses and abuses of contrivance where professional collaboration is on external agendas, that other people decide, at times of their choosing, in relation to purposes in which teachers have no control and that – in the case of gaming the system to cross test score thresholds, for example – may even be suspect.

To contrive something is to do more than merely organize and arrange it. Deliberate change requires deliberate measures. But to make things contrived is to push them quite a bit further. It is to make them unnatural, false, artificial, even forced. Contrived collegiality is collaboration on steroids. In the end, the drawbacks and benefits of *arranged collegiality* (at its best) and *contrived collegiality* (at its worst) are not to be found in whether or not particular structures or practices are suddenly introduced – like planning times, protocols or procedures for analyzing data. The differences between merely arranged and artificially contrived or forced collegiality are to be found in whether there is already enough trust, respect and understanding in a culture, for any new structures or arrangements to have the capacity to move that culture ahead.

This is not a question of whether administrators or teachers should be the driving force behind professional collaboration. The question is that if there is any pressure, whether it is exerted by principals or by peers, what distinguishes good pressure from bad pressure? Pressure from peers is inherently no better than pressure from principals or other administrative leaders if the pressure is of the wrong kind, exerted in the wrong way.

These issues have been addressed by Amanda Datnow (2011) in a study of the dynamics of data-driven teams in two school districts. Using the concepts of collaborative cultures and contrived collegiality as a touchstone for her team's analysis, she found that while the collaboration promoted by both districts was administratively regulated and designed to meet the districts' purposes through such devices as mandated meeting times and prescribed questions within meeting protocols, many of the negative effects normally associated with contrived collegiality did not take hold. Rather, "what began as contrived meetings to discuss data evolved into spaces for more genuine collaborative activity wherein teachers challenged each other, raised questions, and shared ideas for teaching" (Datnow 2011).

The explanation for this finding is interesting. There was already quality, integrity and long-term stability in these districts' leadership, even before the introduction of data-driven improvement. The districts had pursued continuous improvement for

some time and been able to “develop trust among teachers, assuage their concerns about how the data reflected upon them as individual teachers, and promote a positive orientation towards data use.” (Datnow 2011). Strong collaborative cultures were the foundation underpinning the immediate efforts at data-driven contrived collegiality.

Professional Learning Communities

When it is used in a facilitative and nudging, not controlling or shoving kind of way, contrived (or arranged) collegiality can also provide a starting point, and a necessary first step toward building collaborative cultures with focus and depth – as in the case of Barry Finlay and the goals of Ontario’s special education initiative to increase collective responsibility among special education staff and those with more general curriculum responsibilities. One of the most significant, sustained and systemically broad efforts to do that has taken the form of *professional learning communities*: a place where the pushes and pulls and nudges of different kinds of collegiality come through with real intensity.

What have we learned so far about the power of professional collaboration that can help us address the dynamics of professional learning communities? Two basic lessons stand out. First, a lot of the work of building professional collaboration is informal. It is about developing trust and relationships and it takes time. But if all this is left entirely to voluntary and open-ended choice, a lot of collaborative effort will dissipate and provide no benefit to anyone, or never even occur at all. Second, positive collaborative work can benefit from teachers sometimes being nudged forward through deliberate arrangements of meetings, teams, structures and protocols. But if these are hurried, imposed or forced, or if they are used in the absence of commitments to building better relationships, then they too will be ineffective. The necessity of arranged collegiality is no excuse for the forceful and even bullying imposition of contrived collegiality whether this is by formal superiors or by people who are technically one’s peers.

Strong and positive collaboration is not about whether everyone has a word wall, or a set of posted standards, or not. It’s about whether teachers are committed to, inquisitive about and increasingly knowledgeable and well-informed about becoming better practitioners together, using and deeply understanding all the technologies and strategies that can help them with this – whether it is a word wall here and there, or something else instead. The place where all these scenarios play out these days is in professional learning communities.

Since the origins of the terms professional community, learning community, and professional learning community in the 1990s, professional learning communities have spread like wildfire. Sometimes, in line with their origins and original intentions, they have been a means to develop teachers' overall capacity for inquiry, improvement and change. Sometimes they have been used as a strategy to implement external reforms – especially in tested literacy and mathematics.

Originally, the inventor of the term professional learning community, Shirley Hord (1997), simply meant that a PLC, as it later came to be called, would be a place where teachers inquired together into how to improve their practice in areas of importance to them, and then implemented what they learned to make it happen. In the spirit of this simple starting point, PLCs can be represented as comprising three things (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012). They are:

1. *Communities*: they are places where people work in continuing groups and relationships (not merely transient teams), where they are committed to and have collective responsibility for a common educational purpose, where they are committed to improving their practice in relation to that purpose, and where they are committed to respecting and caring for each others' lives and dignity as professionals and as people.
2. *Learning communities*: in which improvement is driven by the commitment to improving students' learning, wellbeing and achievement; in which the process of improvement is heavily informed by professional learning and inquiry into students' learning and into effective principles of teaching and learning in general; and in which any problems are addressed through organizational learning where everyone in the organization learns their way out of problems instead of jumping for off-the-shelf, quick-fix solutions.
3. *Professional learning communities*: where collaborative improvements and decisions are informed by but not dependent on scientific and statistical evidence, where they are guided by experienced collective judgment, and where they are pushed forward by grown-up, challenging conversations about effective and ineffective practice.

Sadly, however, professional learning communities have often been imposed in a simplistic and heavy-handed way by overzealous administrations and workshop consultants. Too often, they have become yet one more 'program to be implemented' rather than a process to be developed. One clear example comes from Alberta in Canada. In a research team that one of us led to review the province's groundbreaking school

improvement initiative, Brent Davis and Dennis Sumara (2009) undertook an in-depth study of three contrasting school districts and how they each approached school-based innovation within the province's wider initiative. One of them decided what their schools' innovations would be – professional learning communities – and imposed them on everyone. Leadership money was spent on moving one or two teachers from the schools to be coordinators in the district office (in another district, by contrast, the money was spent on providing bits of time for lots of teachers to interact and inquire into their practice together within and across their schools); and on bringing in well-known external trainers to do multi-day workshops with school teams. The aim was to achieve alignment in the district. But in practice, the only time the schools met each other was during the workshops. Because leadership was concentrated in the district office and imposed from the top, none of the schools knew what the others were doing. Ironically, the district ended up getting very little alignment at all because the PLCs were laid on, there was not enough leadership to spread around, and the only learning that was going on was from the external consultants.

Diane Woods' (2007) research pinpoints how PLCs, like many reforms, are often viewed differently by people at the top compared to those on the ground. Charles Naylor (2005), a professional development leader for the British Columbia Teachers' Federation, has seen how the importation and implementation of Professional Learning Communities from the United States has fared in high capacity, high performing Canada and is not impressed with the results. The worst proponents of PLCs, he says, avoid connecting them to innovative and ambitious learning goals but stick to the technicalities of specifying narrow performance goals, defining a focus, examining data and establishing teams.

There is a dilemma here. If someone doesn't push PLCs, there is a worry that individually autonomous teachers may not get around to purposeful interaction. But a push can quickly convert a nudge into a shove. More than this, do we really want improvement to happen as a result of a collection of change pushers? Why does change always have to be driven or pushed from somewhere else or by someone else? Change isn't a drug. It shouldn't turn agents into pushers. In a study I have conducted with Alma Harris on organizations that perform above expectations in business, sport and education, one of the organizations is a highly successful craft brewery, featured on the Discovery Channel – Dogfish Head beer – that has unusual and innovative ways of approaching change and improvement. The case study writers here were Corrie Johnson and Alex Gurn.

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At Dogfish Head Craft Brewery, the Dogfish way of creating “off-centered ales for off-centered people” is all about living life counter-intuitively, against the grain. Dogfish Head’s employment of ‘opposite- approach strategies’ works to turn conventional industry practice on its head and circumvent the big three US beer companies’ attempts at structured market domination. For instance, instead of adopting conventional push strategies of marketing, which advertise the product far and wide, Dogfish Head uses pull-marketing at craft beer events and the like that devote time face to face with people and that develop a cult following. “From the outset, it’s still this fun, funky thing that people just gravitate to”, they say. (Hargreaves and Harris 2011)

It sounds like tough talk – the kind that appeals to politicians and high level administrators in places like the US – to be saying we need to be *pushing* things all the time, either from above or from one’s peers. But professional learning communities, collaboration, and change in general, are as much about *pulling* people towards interesting change by the excitement of the process, the inspirational feeling of the engagement, the connection to people’s passions and purposes, the provision of time that is not consumed by classroom responsibilities or mandated change agendas, and the creation of not just a spreadsheet of higher test scores, but a culture of engaged and successful learners. Create positive energy and excitement in relation to a commonly valued goal and you will always *pull* lots of people towards you. Here is an example from Limeside Primary School in the North of England – part of the Beyond Expectations study conducted with Alma Harris. Kathryn Ghent was the fieldworker at this school.

In June 2000, Limeside Primary School, on a deprived council estate in the North of England, was classified by the English inspection service, Ofsted, as needing to go into “Special Measures”. Less than a third of the children were reaching proficiency on standardized achievement tests and many children were leaving school “not able to read”. “It really hurt”, the headteacher recalled. The school was “a slum school that nobody wanted to go to, in a slum estate that nobody wanted to live in”. “There were no real expectations for the children. It was kind of, ‘Well they’re Limeside children, so what can you expect?’”

Over the years, the school turned around with many familiar strategies such as establishing a calm climate with a positive behavior strategy, setting a common vision, relentlessly tracking children’s progress, and changing teachers’ roles and responsibilities. The great leap forward, though, was higher expectations for success from everyone and the teaching and learning strategies to match them. These days, in the words of a teaching assistant, “Limeside gives them the confidence to achieve”.

The strategies were collective and often counterintuitive to the relentless, earnest push to track and drill people to get improvements in measurable results. Teachers were pulled as much as pushed forward by energizing innovations that yielded increased engagement as well as achievement. Philosophy sessions enabled children to discuss school rules and problems in an open forum. The headteacher introduced meditation each morning to settle children and staff into the day. Children are also explicitly taught prior learning, learning styles and meta-cognition. Wall displays show jigsaw puzzle pieces with the key

thinking skills and activities within them. Children are able to follow the framework, looking at prior knowledge, identifying the task, working together and trying to find the best way of solving the problems, then teaching somebody else when they've managed it.

The school bought wizard hats and cloaks and anybody who has shown they are a wizard learner in mastering the key thinking skills is dressed up in assembly to receive their certificate. "The wizard learner is a real event and this wizard is able to ask questions. He's able to work with somebody else. He's able to do lots of home learning. He's able to know what to do when you don't know what to do." The consequence is confidence, accomplishment and more collective confidence for children and teachers alike. "It's a major high when you see a child that has struggled and struggled but persevered and has shown that 'I am going to do this' and they walk up on that stage at the end of so many weeks and they get there and what they say is, 'I've turned a corner, I can do it and not only can I do it but I can show somebody else how to do it.' That's a real high when you see that".

In general, we need to move the debate away from pushing PLCs per se into developing processes where teachers will encourage and challenge each other as well as challenge their leaders as part and parcel of the give and take of continuous improvement. Again, there needn't be an ideological battle between tender words and tough talk, between pushing and pulling as well as nudging change forward. Usually, what will be involved from different quarters is a bit of push, a bit of pull and a bit of push back. And when all the forces come together, the results can be dynamic. All this is evident in an Ontario school district that has been studied as part of an investigation co-directed with Henry Braun of special education reform strategies in 10 (of the 72) districts in the province (Hargreaves and Braun 2012). Here is an example from one of the districts where the push and pull of administrative superiors in developing and administering professional learning communities becomes a push too far for some colleagues. This is an edited and extended report from the original account of case writer, Matt Welch.

Dave Perkins (a pseudonym and composite of two district administrators) is Director (superintendent) of a Northern Canadian school district that has 24 elementary and secondary schools with a 40% population of First Nations (aboriginal) students in a far-flung territory the size of France.

We investigated how Dave's district used project funding for whole-school approaches to special education reform. Every district took a different approach. Dave's district initially used its resources for supply (or substitute) teacher coverage to allow both general and special education teachers to attend PLC meetings together and for "capacity building" more generally. The reflective aspects of PLCs in this district allowed teachers to increase their awareness that the significant language challenges of their aboriginal students were less a matter of inherent and insurmountable cognitive impairment, but a developmental and experiential issue that could be addressed collaboratively as well as pedagogically.

Dave and his colleagues pulled teachers in by having flexible formats and focal points in different schools and by funding ample release time to break down the separation between

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special education and curriculum staff: “sharing strategies, supporting each other talking about at-risk kids, talking about special needs.” They also pushed frank discussion about teaching strategies and about expectations for aboriginal students’ learning.

There was a lot more self-direction in the PLCs coming from teachers. It was more “Let’s make sure we’re focused and make sure we’re doing something and our school energies are all being harnessed and directed in unison rather than us all paddling our own little canoes in different directions.

As teachers reflected on their students’ performance data, collaborated, and discussed students’ needs, the task of improving students’ writing no longer mainly meant reviewing student performance on practice prompts or drills related to the high stakes standardized tests. Rather, as the PLC process “unfolded, we began to see more and more connection between early language development as oral language development [and] reading development, writing development, and overall literacy development.” Staff became increasingly aware that many low-SES aboriginal students were entering school with very little existing language capacity whatsoever. During walkthroughs, staff presented early childhood classrooms where groups of students were using a variety of tools to build literacy skills (e.g. computers, board games, and manipulatives). Younger students now had their needs brought to the fore, and teachers began to see the connection to measured literacy performance in later grades.

PLCs could sometimes become quite confrontational, but mainly in a productive way. The district’s data administrator described how it was:

Very confrontational for one teacher – not in a negative way, but they definitely felt that they needed to be able to defend the way that they wanted to mark and grade student work. And she walked away from the table understanding that she wasn’t using a criterion-based assessment even though she had developed a rubric but [the grade was] based on the effort that they were working on. That was her peers at the table. She didn’t go away upset. She went away saying, “I need to rethink this”.

Facilitating the challenging work that enabled teachers to have productive and frank conversations took time. In the words of one teacher:

Pushing people outside of their comfort zone, as difficult as it is, it truly is successful because in time we were able to see changes in the content of discussion and the quality of the discussions that were happening around the table, but it took a lot of time.

Teachers said they were more frequently “listening to colleagues and watching what they’re doing,” and described how they were “more willing” to try colleagues’ ideas since they had built “relationships.” One said, “if we’re going to be an effective school we need those relationships.”

You would think that all this would make the superintendent and his staff self-congratulatory about their success. There were definitely pressures in bringing about changes through “frank” conversations, and these were by no means always seen as positive and productive. The special education coordinator for the district talked about this tension:

“Teachers definitely are feeling that they’re under more scrutiny, more pressure from senior administration. Principals regularly are in classrooms. They’re doing walkthroughs. They’re looking for specific things. They want to see evidence that guided reading is happening. They want to see evidence of all of the initiatives that the board is working on. There is a lot of pressure on teachers to make changes and they certainly are feeling that pressure”.

When this superintendent met with the research team and all his fellow district superintendents from elsewhere, he spoke movingly about how valuable the case study reports had been to him and his district. “I thought I was having challenging conversations with my staff”, he said, to open up practice and raise expectations. “But since I read this report”, he continued, “I realize that what I intended to be challenging conversations have sometimes been experienced as oppressive conversations”. That is just the perception of some of my staff”, he went on, “but perception is reality and I have to learn from this and take it very seriously”.

Courageous leaders of PLCs are not bullying and self-congratulatory. They nudge, but they don’t shove. They are humble and self-reflective. Commenting on the inherent difficulty of leading an effective PLC, Dave looked to his own practice. “To this day, even as a superintendent, I don’t think I could hold (run) a perfect, effective PLC (discussion)”, he said.

There are some powerful concluding lessons from this example about PLCs, their nature and their momentum. They have a back and forth feel between the relative contribution of pressure and support, push and pull, focus and flexibility, relationships and results. In this district,

- Teachers are *pulled* into something they find energizing, that they are given time for, and that respects their collective (not individual) professional autonomy and discretion; yet they are also *pushed* to review or revise what has been more or less effective for them, and to acquire practices from other colleagues who may be doing some things better.
- PLCs have a clear focus, but this is collectively and *flexibly* determined by the community – not administratively imposed on everyone, in a standardized way, from outside.
- There is a sense of *urgency* about challenging teachers’ practice, yet also a *patient* realization that the essential trust and relationships that underpin PLCs can only develop over time.
- The superintendent is *firm and persistent* enough to challenge his teachers and leaders with frankness, yet *humble and open* enough to know when he has to pull back because he has gone too far.

Conclusion

A professional culture, we have seen, connects the way people perform their work, to the people they are, the purposes they pursue, the colleagues they have, and how they do or don't improve. In the old days, and still too much today, the professional culture of teaching was one of individual classroom autonomy, unquestioned experience and unassailable knowledge and expertise. Nowadays, professional cultures are more and more collaborative. Teachers may still actually teach alone for much of the time, but the power of the group, and all the group's insight, knowledge, experience and support, is always with them. The best groups are places where teachers share collective responsibility for all their students – with teachers in other subjects and grades, and with teaching assistants as well. They are places where teachers constantly inquire into learning and problems together, drawing on their different experiences of particular children or strategies, and on what the evidence they can collect is telling them – about the best way to approach a child, a difficult curriculum concept, an unfamiliar innovation, or a group of learners who are falling behind, together. And they are places where teachers don't just endure but actively enjoy challenging and being challenged by their colleagues and their administrators when results are disappointing, levels of commitment and standards of professionalism start to wane, old habits are not supported by the evidence of what's effective, change efforts seem headed in the wrong direction, behaviour is personally inconsiderate, or there are just better ideas around that need to be embraced in order to move things ahead.

Professional learning communities need an architecture or design if they are going to be productive. They have to be organized and arranged. As in Finland, where teachers spend less of their time in classrooms with their students than any other developed country, time allocations in the school day have to honor teachers' need to have time outside of the classroom together to inquire into their practice and how to improve it together (Sahlberg 2011). Team meetings need a commonly agreed purpose and agenda. Staff meetings need to look more like high quality professional learning than places to deliver announcements. Teachers have to be drawn or *pulled* into these communities, as well as driven or *pushed* by them. In the very best cases, teaching itself is often collaborative. It's the joint work that Judith Warren Little (1990) recommended – with integrated projects moving across grade levels, middle school teachers working in teams who share and often teach large groups of students together, and special educational resource teachers working alongside grade level teachers in the regular classroom setting, for example. In all these cases, professional collaboration is structured, expected, simply the way of working that teaching now has to be.

The days when individual teachers could just do anything they liked, good or bad, right or wrong, are numbered, and in many places, now obsolete. Teaching is a profession with shared purposes, collective responsibility and mutual learning.

But the new expectation that professional cultures have to be ones of *collective* autonomy, transparency and responsibility, that have to be deliberately arranged and structured around these principles, should not be a license for administrative bullying and abuse or enforced contrivance either. When push comes to shove, as it were, professional learning communities are not and should not be professional data communities or professional test score communities. They are not and should not be places for administrators to shove questionable district agendas on to teachers who are gathered together after busy days in class to pore over spreadsheets simply to come up with quick interventions that will raise test scores in a few weeks or less. They are not and should not be places where overloaded literacy coaches convene hurried meetings with harried teachers who scarcely have time to refocus from the preceding class, before they have to rush off to the next one. Nor are they or should they be places where principals and superintendents convert challenging conversations into hectoring harangues, and where all the challenges come from above, with no comebacks or reciprocal challenges allowed from teachers themselves.

The core principles of professional learning communities that are consistent with their origins are about teachers developing their commitments and capabilities, pushing and pulling but never shoving their peers, and exercising collective responsibility together for the greater good of students that transcends them all. Professional learning communities and collective responsibility will not look identical in all cultures and contexts. In Finland, they look like teachers being given a problem, then quietly solving it together. In Singapore, they are urgent, energetic and always involves food, in a high-powered culture where, as one Singaporean educator put it, “we eat and we run. We eat and we run!” (Hargreaves and Shirley 2012). But in all cases, wherever resources allow, professional autonomy can no longer be reducible to individual classroom autonomy, collective responsibility should be a key goal in building professional learning communities, and while the process for creating this collaboration will often require the nudges of deliberate arrangements to enhance learning, it should never extend to the forceful shoving and bullying of forced implementation that is the antithesis of the very thing it is claiming to create.

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Bridges for Academic Success: Opening Spaces for Culturally Responsive Practice in an Urban Pre-School

Denise Jones and Susan Browne

ABSTRACT

It has become widely understood that formal early childhood education can be an important factor in school success. Equally significant is the role of culture as a determinant in negotiating school. Thereby, the inclusion of student culture remains an important aspect in conversations on school success. This discourse is capable of promoting learning using the lives of students by building on what they already know, while offering opportunities for academic achievement. This study investigated how professional development workshops on culturally responsive practice for urban pre-school teachers encouraged the examination of current classroom practices and offered a process for transformation.

It has become widely understood that formal early childhood education can be an important factor in a child's future success. It is during these years that major portions of a young child's intellect, social skills, and personality are developed, giving pre-school the opportunity to have significant impact on these areas. However, too often there is a tendency for schools and school curriculum to delegitimize the real-life experiences of culturally diverse students. In fact, for these students, culture has persistently been linked to a lack of school success in troubling ways. Darling-Hammond (2007) points to the standardized test scores of low performing students as a means of further inscribing failure for many students of color. For instance, low performing schools are responsible for making yearly progress despite being underfunded while serving needier students. Although standardized test scores have increased for African American students, on average African American students still do not perform as well as their white counterparts.

The deeply rooted and pervasive challenges of schools in urban settings continue to be an area of critical concern. These schools have fewer resources and overwhelmingly provide educational experiences inferior to schools with greater resources that lead to a severe opportunity gap and what Ladson-Billings (2006) refers to as an educational debt that is owed. The academic needs of students often appear prior to enrollment in first grade. The Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey of Kindergarten (NCES, 2007) monitored a sample of young students from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds and provided a sample of their early school experiences, and results of their school readiness testing. The results of the study demonstrated that enrolling low-income children in early childhood programs improves outcomes in elementary school, with benefits that include higher achievement test scores, reduced need for special education services, and lower grade retention rates (NCES, 2007). Research by Grissmer and Eiseman (2008) focusing on the importance of early childhood experiences supports that achievement disparities emerge before students enter the first grade. Georgia, the first state to offer universal pre-kindergarten, authorized a longitudinal study in 1996 that included 3,042 children in Pre-Kindergarten. The result of the study concluded that students who attended Pre-K did better than students who had not attended. Low socioeconomic students who attended early childhood programs performed better throughout school than those students who had not attended early childhood programs. Given this knowledge, Dunne (2010) asserts that the main goal for providing quality early childhood programs is to help eliminate the achievement gap between low socioeconomic status students and their more affluent peers.

Culture as a Critical Determinant in the Ability to Negotiate School

Classroom environment and the inclusion of student culture are important pieces in conversations on school success. Shevalier and McKenzie (2012) argue that cultural and linguistic diversity are valuable resources in urban schools. They go on to say that teachers who combine culturally responsive teaching with caring, ethics-based approaches are more successful in educating urban students. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in their 2009 Quality Benchmark for Cultural Competence Project report that for the “optimal development and learning of all children, educators must accept the legitimacy of children’s home language, respect the home culture, and promote and encourage the active involvement and support of all families, including extended and nontraditional family units” (p. 2). The report frames home culture as

family socioeconomic status, family composition, parent's level of educational attainment, abilities of children and family members, family's immigration status, family's religion, family's home and preferred languages, parent's sexual orientation, and the way that a family classifies its race and ethnicity. (pp. 2–3)

Researchers, such as Banks (1999), Gay (2000, 2002), Hale-Benson (1982), Hollins (1993), Nieto (1999), King (1992), and Ladson-Billings (1995, 2006, 2009), have long asserted that student achievement would increase if classroom instruction included students' home cultures. This body of research offers a knowledge base that reminds us that culture is a critical determinant in the ability to negotiate school.

Purpose

Based on data provided by the National Center for Education Statistics, among the issues that continue to impact urban classrooms are racial, ethnic, and/or class disparities between students and their teachers (NCES, 2010). The 2008 Civil Rights Project reports that as student diversity continues to rapidly grow, the racial composition of teachers remains overwhelmingly white with inadequate attention to helping teachers prepare for the increasing racial transformation in the nation's schools.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how professional development workshops on culturally responsive practice provided for four urban pre-school teachers might encourage the examination of current classroom practices and offer opportunities for transformation where needed. As educators and researchers who share backgrounds and teaching experiences rooted in urban settings, the authors' practice and scholarship are informed by the view that culturally responsive pedagogy works to construct learning in ways that value what students inherently bring with them to school. We contend that culturally responsive practice is capable of offering a bridge that leads to academic success for students in underserved contexts. Yet, Sleeter (2012) points to a gap in research regarding professional development on culturally responsive practice and its impact on student achievement. Nonetheless, according to Phillips, McNaughton, and MacDonald (2004), there remains promise in the ways that professional development has had major influences on adult learners and how teachers instruct students.

A Culturally Responsive Teaching Stance

Villegas (2002) describes effective culturally responsive teachers as educators who believe that they are responsible for and capable of bringing about educational change. These teachers know the ways in which students construct knowledge. This kind of teaching is capable of promoting learning, using the lives of students by building on what they already know, while stretching them beyond the familiar. We define “culturally responsive pedagogy” as centering teaching on the students’ culture and environment while infusing the district’s curriculum. As classrooms become more diverse, so must the practices of teachers. The course of action for restructuring teaching practices to include an emphasis on culture can be achieved through filtering or restructuring the current process. Ladson-Billings (2009) describes the filtering process as incorporating these five characteristics into teaching practice:

1. When students are treated as competent they are likely to demonstrate competence.
2. When teachers provide instructional “scaffolding” students can move from what they know to what they need to know.
3. The focus of the classroom must be instructional where students and teachers engage in serious work that is communicated clearly.
4. Real education is about extending students’ thinking abilities.
5. Effective teaching involves in-depth knowledge of both the students and the subject matter. (p. 133)

Similarly, Gay (2002) describes culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of diverse students as a means for adequately teaching them. According to Gay (2000), culturally responsive teaching is illustrated utilizing the following six approaches: 1. Validation (using student learning styles while focusing on the strengths of each student); 2. Comprehensive (teaching to the entire student, that includes social, emotional, cognitive, and content considerations); 3. Multidimensional (focusing on instructional content, learning context, classroom environment, student-teacher relationships, instructional strategies, and student performance); 4. Empowerment (encouraging and motivating students to believe in their own success); 5. Transformative (using and respecting students’ cultural background/experiences and incorporating into instruction; and 6. Emancipatory (guiding students into understanding that there are many definitions of “truth” and all are imperfect).

Methodology

This study utilized naturalistic participatory research and raw data were obtained through methods of observation as well as qualitative interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In addition, the participatory approach can be described as a cultural building process (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). The study was conducted in a preschool located in a northeastern urban school district. The preschool's mission focuses on a school facility that services the social, emotional, and scholastic needs of students. The 456 students are 91% African American, 8% Hispanic, and 1% other. The school, a new "state of the art" facility, has a staff that is 76% African American, 20% Hispanic, and 4% Caucasian. The mission of the school is to provide students with various learning opportunities with the assistance of personnel, learning resources, as well as resources to prepare for future academic challenges. The school emphasizes utilizing cultural sensitivity in the classroom, however, the sensitivity and importance of incorporating students' real-life experiences and cultural knowledge is not consistently present. The case study approach was used to investigate how professional development on culturally responsive practice impacted the four teachers. Data were analyzed descriptively and underwent Yin's (2003) process of pattern-matching.

Participant Profiles

The four participants entered the study with prior teaching experience in an urban school district. Three of the four teachers possess master's degrees in education and P-3 certification with the exception of the Kindergarten teacher who has a Bachelor's degree and K-8 certification. The race of the participants included two Caucasian teachers and two African American teachers. The participants were all female and their socioeconomic status was middle class. Participants were selected with less than three years of service at the school. These teachers may not have been fully inculcated into the culture of the school and were more likely to implement change.

Table 1
Participants' Characteristics

PARTICIPANTS	MS. KELLY	MS. BENSON	MS. DUNCAN	MS. BENET
Education	B.A	M.S./M.Ed.	M.S/M.Ed.	M.Ed.
Age	45-55	45-55	26-30	29-36
Race	Caucasian	Caucasian	African American	African American
Licensure/ Certification	K-8	K-8	P-3 Cert.	P-3 Cert.
Years at school	2	1	2	2
Grade	K	Pre-K	Pre-K	Pre-K
Resident and teaching in same city				X

Below are the responses to the survey question that asked participants to "Describe their knowledge/beliefs around teaching African American students in urban settings."

Ms. Kelly

Ms. Kelly explained that she adjusts her pedagogy according to the needs of her students. She said if real learning takes place it is because the educators are able to relate to their students. Ms. Kelly described herself as an educator who believes that sensitivity towards social class takes precedence over culture when comparing urban and suburban students. Ms. Kelly strives to integrate her students' culture through various activities such as celebrations, classroom assignments, and books.

Ms. Benson

Ms. Benson described her prior knowledge of teaching urban students as minimal. She believes that while teachers learn about their students, the students in return learn about their teacher. She described her pedagogy as a multifaceted one that considers various issues of her students such as working single mothers and fathers, siblings raising siblings, hunger, and bullying. She values parents as well as her relationship with her students and stated that her students trusting and feeling safe within her classroom was also an important part of her pedagogy.

Ms. Duncan

Ms. Duncan began teaching in an urban school district through Teach for America. Her teaching beliefs focus on success for all students regardless of race or socioeconomic status. Her philosophy of teaching realizes that there must be considerations of social class, poverty, and high unemployment, especially in the city where her students live. Her pedagogy has a lens that views student and parent.

Ms. Benet

Ms. Benet has primarily taught Hispanic students in urban districts. She believes that effective classroom structure builds a strong foundation of consistency for students.

The table below is a summary of responses to an interview question that asked the participants to specifically address how they draw on their students' culture when teaching.

Table 2
Teachers' Initial Responses

	MS. KELLY	MS. BENSON	MS. DUNCAN	MS. BENET
How do you draw upon students' culture/ experiences in the classroom?	In my classroom I display and read books that relate to my children's culture.	We turned a fake spruce tree where the kids learned about evergreens and needles into a family tree with pictures of their families and they were proud to stand up and identify their family members.	We use Spanish music, Latin dance songs, and language.	I find that I need to make a conscious effort to incorporate other cultures in my teaching methods.

These initial responses indicate that each of the teachers recognize the role of culture in a pedagogical stance. Although the participants embraced the role of culture in teaching, in large part, the discussion did not move beyond superficial understandings or engage in discourse that emerged from theoretical perspectives on culturally responsive practice. Creating a safe space for participants to discuss their pedagogical perspectives was an integral part in assisting with opportunities for transformation. Most of the teachers initially believed that the role of culturally centered practice was primarily accomplished through the use of art, music, experimenting with food, and celebrating holidays. Banks (1999) describes the teachers' initial beliefs as lower level generalizations. References to families and economic status offered a strong bridge for building a deeper knowledge base.

Professional Development Workshops

The professional development workshops were constructed based on the ways participants expressed their understandings of culturally responsive practice. They were designed to offer opportunities to embrace a pedagogy that Gay (2002) would describe as comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, and/or transformative.

Professional Development Workshop 1

Responding to multicultural picture books to discuss diversity in families. The workshop began with a conversation in response to three picture books, *Visiting Day* by Jacqueline Woodson, *A Shelter in Our Car* by Monica Gunning, and *Heather Has Two Mommies* by Leslea Newman. The workshop focused on how the books represent a changing definition of family.

Professional Development Workshop 2

Cultural autobiographies and envisioning culturally responsive practice. Participants were asked to write their own cultural autobiography that included life events related to education, family, religious tradition, victories, as well as defeats. The intent of this assignment was to help the participants build and document personal beliefs so that they could connect how these events formed their traditions and cultural beliefs (Banks, 1994). The assignment described Banks' philosophy that writing your own autobiography helps identify beliefs and attitudes that form the traditions and

values of culture. Gay's (2000) theory of responsive teaching was also introduced to help participants further consider fostering culturally responsive pedagogy.

Professional Development Workshop 3

Culturally situated practice as a journey. Each meeting began with a discussion of Professional Standards for Teachers and how they connected to the planned goals of the workshop. This workshop focused on the journey of cultural responsiveness in education. We wanted the participants to gain a sense of understanding that change, particularly reforming one's pedagogy, is a process, much like a journey. The participants returned with their autobiographies and we asked that they listen to them for the characteristics that may have shaped the teacher's cultural background particularly as it related to Gay's theory on cultural responsiveness.

Professional Development Workshop 4

Crafting a cultural biography of a student. This workshop focused on identifying a student of a different culture/background and then writing a biography. The assignment then asked participants to do a cross-analysis of teacher and student by utilizing the participant's autobiography and a student's biography. The intended result was that participants learn how to form a deeper understanding of their students. The concept was reinforced that in order for teachers to effectively teach their students, they had to first "know" their students.

The second part of the workshop focused on creating a culturally responsive classroom using Gays' (2002) concept of multidimensional techniques to foster culturally responsive teaching.

Professional Development Workshop 5

Culturally responsive teaching through classroom management. This workshop focused on practicing culturally responsive practice through classroom management. A culturally responsive classroom includes pedagogical approaches that guide the management decisions that teachers make. Weinstein, Curran, and Tomlinson-Clarke (2003) suggested that culturally responsive classroom management is an extension of culturally responsive teaching, which utilizes the background of a student's social experiences. Honoring culture was illustrated through the five essential elements of culturally responsive classroom management that include: 1. recognizing of one's own cultural lens, and biases (Weinstein et al., 2003); 2. acknowledging students' cultural

backgrounds such as learning styles and behavior (Sheets & Gay, 1996); 3. establishing awareness of the broader, social, economic, and political context of school policies and practices and how they might marginalize students (Black, 2006); 4. using culturally appropriate management strategies to foster diversity (Weinstein et al., 2003); and 5. committing to creating a caring community by establishing positive relationships between teacher and student (Weinstein et al., 2003).

Professional Development Workshop 6

Investigating practices and transforming pedagogy. The final workshop focused on supporting classroom change that participants made over the course of the workshops. The change model was an important element for reinforcing ideas and strategies introduced over the course of the study. Considerable time was devoted to discussing the following six-step change model (Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector, 1990):

1. Diagnosing the current situation—Does your current pedagogy address the needs of your students?
2. Developing a vision for change—Do you change your philosophy when the current classroom strategy is unsuccessful?
3. Gaining commitment to the vision—Do you have support in place to help you?
4. Developing an action plan—Do you utilize a set of steps to help establish change within the classroom during a certain timeframe?
5. Implementing change—Do you utilize tools or strategies to help foster culturally responsive teaching?
6. Assessing and reinforcing change—Do you utilize strategies to help reinforce the success of your pedagogy?

Findings

Collectively, the participants remained vigilant about the importance of their students excelling academically. To varying degrees, participants recognized that they excluded culture from teaching practices while focusing more on concepts or subject

matter. In addition, participants believed because of their students' age and grade level, an emphasis on culture was not appropriate or necessary.

It was through professional development workshops and reflective practice that the participants began to consider responsive practice as a pedagogical stance. As a result of the workshops, they were becoming mindful of how traditional teaching practices, combined with district policy and mandated state standards, often excluded student culture. This mindfulness was significant to the potential instantiation of practice that uses culture to inform instruction.

The participants were asked to investigate their instructional practices and their evolving transformation. The table below demonstrates participants' responses on change relevant to fostering culturally responsive pedagogy.

Table 3
Supporting Change

	MS. KELLY	MS. BENSON	MS. DUNCAN	MS. BENET
Current pedagogy addresses the needs of all students	Always	Always	Sometimes	Always
Philosophy of change	Always	Always	Always	Always
Current classroom support	Sometimes	Sometimes		Sometimes
Available tools for fostering culturally responsive pedagogy	Sometimes	Always	Sometimes	Always
Present positive reinforcement strategies	Always	Always	Sometimes	Always

The teachers began to generously examine their own lens for understanding culturally responsive pedagogy. They acknowledged that change was necessary, as well as accompanying support. The six-step change model of Beer et al. (1990) helped facilitate the participants shift from “I know what culturally responsive pedagogy is” to “I don’t know as much as I thought but will make changes to implement the practice.”

As the preliminary findings emerged, a limited knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy was evident. An analysis of the data indicated that each participant demonstrated a cursory reflective nature regarding the role of a culture in classroom practice. Thereby, all of the teachers fell short of demonstrating a strong pedagogical understanding around the transformative potential of culturally responsive practices. Gay (2000) describes “transformative pedagogy” as using students’ cultural background as a means of establishing instructional lessons. Moreover, Gay asserts that teachers have to first become aware of their instructional methods and then how to modify them to adapt to diverse student populations. The participants, according to Argyris and Schon (1974), demonstrated incongruities between their espoused theories and theories in use. An analysis of data through the lens of culturally relevant theory positioned all the teachers as emerging with the utilization of culturally responsive pedagogy as an empowerment process.

Creating the workshops as a safe space for participants to discuss their pedagogical perspectives was an integral part of embracing culturally responsive practices as transformative pedagogy.

Evolving Perspectives

Early in the study Ms. Kelly explained,

Truthfully I don’t think I’m right for this study. I just don’t get it; I don’t get culturally responsive teaching. When I was going to school to become a teacher I was taught to just teach subject matter and nothing else.

The professional development workshops were intended to support teachers’ pedagogical stance, rather than fix perspective and theory (Hawley & Nieto, 2010). The workshops were a significant place from which each teacher’s perspective could evolve.

Ms. Kelly: “I will make more of an effort to bring my students’ culture into all content areas and I would like to make my class more multicultural while exposing children to other cultures in different subject areas.”

Ms. Duncan: “I will do my best to be more responsive to the needs of all students in my class, whether they come from a different cultural background than me. In addition, I will continue speaking with other professionals who may be more familiar with the culture than I am, so I can incorporate as much of their cultures and belief systems within the classroom.”

Mrs. Benet: “I understand a little bit more why it is important and how I can improve my practices. I will use the knowledge gained from the workshops to guide my planning and as a reminder to consider the beliefs and culture of my students, their families, and the learning community.”

Mrs. Benson: “The workshops have brought more ideas to embed into my lessons. I know I can be creative enough to allow more sharing of students’ lives in the classroom.”

The teacher perspectives illustrated a strong belief in demonstrating fairness to students, eliminating prior biases, establishing a positive classroom environment, being sensitive to each student’s religious beliefs, and eliciting instructional materials suited for the diversity of the students. While the participants’ perspectives were directly linked to their espoused theory, they all emphasized the importance of including their students’ culture into their instructional lessons as a pedagogical stance.

Each participant arrived at different times regarding her own consciousness of fostering culturally responsive pedagogy and taking a stance to integrate students’ culture into the curriculum. The study introduced several purposeful research questions that examined each teacher’s beliefs, values, understanding, and implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy in their classrooms. The intent was to explore each teacher’s current pedagogy and how it facilitated learning of culturally diverse students. The larger goal of the study was to ensure that the students’ culture was being implemented within the curriculum and during instructional class time through the use of professional development workshops. The analysis of the data demonstrated that while the teachers believed they were knowledgeable about the preschool environment, they needed to gain knowledge of their students to help build a strong relationship.

Culturally relevant theory helped to explore the participants' instructional methods and also allowed them to self-evaluate and question their current pedagogy. This type of questioning is similar to unloading and reloading a large box of books. The teachers initially rejected that their previous knowledge was faulty or needed to be "unloaded and then reloaded" with the different information. The participants remained vigilant about the importance of their students excelling academically. The teachers, in varying degrees, were mindful of how "traditional teaching" practices, combined with district policy and mandated state standards, tended to exclude student culture from the curriculum. It was through professional development workshops and reflective practice that the participants had become informed of the integration of student culture within their daily lesson.

Conclusion

Social inequality is evident in policies, teacher preparation programs, and public schools where culture is vaguely mentioned. Teachers should be interested in linking the home environment to classroom practices so that student-teacher interactions are meaningful as well as significantly impacting student success. The teachers, as a result of this study, have made definitive strides in cultural references and continue to explore fostering culturally responsive pedagogy within their classroom practices. This exploration of culturally responsive pedagogy is critical for all teachers who differ culturally from their students but understand that it is necessary for the rights and academic growth of the students.

Ongoing professional development on implementing culturally responsive teaching in urban schools, particularly in an early childhood setting, is a significant course of action to support school reform. This structure supports apprenticing students as members of a learning community where knowledge is contextualized and students' real-life experiences are legitimized (Ladson-Billings, 2009) and it works against conceptions that African American cultural knowledge serves as an impediment to educational achievement (Gadsden, 1994). The participants in this study agreed that their initial knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy was limited and that further work regarding integrating their students' culture needed discussion. The teachers began to examine their own lens for understanding culturally responsive pedagogy. Culturally relevant theory helped the participants to self-evaluate and question their current pedagogy. It was through professional development workshops and reflection

on practice that the participants became informed about the integration of student culture in the classroom.

Professional development that is geared towards understanding culturally responsive teaching can engender significant shifts in classroom practice. It can help impact classroom climate and student learning. Such workshops can provide a knowledge base that was not embedded in teacher education programs. The development of culturally responsive teachers helps establish a foundation for strong classroom environments that meet the needs of students while holding promise for increasing student achievement.

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A Narrative Conception of Professional Development as a Nested Community

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ABSTRACT

Thinking narratively (Clandinin, 2013), we inquire into our ongoing personal and professional development within the shaping of a nested community. By traveling to diverse worlds (Lugones, 1987), we attend to some of our stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) and illuminate how living and telling stories within our community shapes and reshapes who we are and are becoming as narrative inquirers. Holding tensions and possibilities close, we create(d) a space where we can be ourselves and can personally and professionally learn alongside one another. It is both a safe space of coming home and starting new journeys.

Storying and Restorying a Community Becoming as Shared From Our Four Perspectives

For us (Hiroko, Jinny, Dorit, and Muna), the imagery of a door opening, sitting ajar, and standing closed has conveyed, at distinct times, the freedom, possibility, and difficulties which contour(ed) our personal and professional stories. This metaphor to live by (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003) has lived in many of our conversations, and we came to understand it as part of our embodied knowing (Johnson, 1989). We recognized, within this nested community, our relationships composed in the midst of challenges, triumphs, disappointments, and promise, continue to unfold even as our stories enfold us.

Jinny: Stepping Beyond the Threshold

By attending to a range of human stories, they may be provoked to heal and to transform. Of course, there will be difficulties in affirming plurality and difference while also working to create communities. . . . Many of us, however, for all the tensions and disagreements that surround us, reaffirm the value of principles like justice, equality, freedom, and commitment to human rights—indeed, without these, we cannot even argue for the decency of welcoming strangers to our midst. (Greene, 1992, p. 259)

 hough Greene does not allude to professional development in this remarkable passage, her insight, nonetheless, invites me to inquire¹ into stories continuously composed over a lifetime of identity-making in relation with others. These are nuanced stories which “attend to the historical, the temporal, the contextual, and the relational” (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011, p. 347). Greene’s words, in particular, “working to create communities,” urge me to think more deeply about the ways in which my professional self intersects with my understanding of what it means to be in community. Professional development, for me then, in its best incarnation is personal, relational, and necessarily hard work. Fundamentally experiential, I perceive it as a living piece of architecture that is intricately wrought and built upon by immeasurable (mis)educative (Dewey, 1938/1997) curriculum-making experiences (Huber et al., 2011). Multilayered and fluid, it is continuously shaped by the stories we tell, live, retell, and relive (Clandinin, 2013; Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013) as members of diverse communities. What follows then, are some understandings which inform(ed) me as a daughter, teacher, and doctoral student as I negotiate(d) my personal and professional identity in community, working within the overlapping commonplaces of learner, teacher, subject matter, and milieus (Schwab, 1973).

As a daughter. A daughter of South Asian parents, I found myself uneasily straddling worlds² (Lugones, 1987) of home and school, experiencing subject matter in (in)harmonious ways. What was taught at home and within my community was not necessarily upheld at school. That is, a cultural narrative of old, which I read as prescribing definitive plotlines for males and females alike (see: Ghosh & Guzder, 2011; Gill & Mitra-Khan, 2009; Goel, 2005; Handa, 2003; Mitra, 2014). As Anzaldúa (1987/1999) conveys, a culture of tyranny exists whereby “culture informs our beliefs. We perceive the version of reality that it communicates” (p. 16). Likewise, Richardson (1997), drawing upon McClelland, cautions cultural stories “are not ‘simply’ stories but are narratives that have real consequences for the fates of individuals, communities, and nations” (p. 32). At home, it was my father’s voice whose was loudest and my mother’s voice

whose was muted. Much like a bird without a song, I thought even as I felt that same silence attempting to swallow me whole.

As a teacher. Teaching proffered a different sense of community. I found community in the day-to-day interactions (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) between the students and myself, in the daily tending to of our unfolding relationships, what Clandinin et al. (2006) have expressed as a “curriculum of lives.” Such a curriculum lived out in this classroom community meant that students, while encouraged to speak their minds, and to actively participate in various school-based activities, also entailed being responsible while showing care and respect for one another. There were challenges as well. Administering Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs) to students hampered by limited experience of the English language and additionally, unfamiliar with the North American milieu, weighed upon me. At the same time, professional development in the form of one- or two-day workshops, while helpful to some degree, did not sustain me as an educator. Moreover, though part of a school community, the lack of time to engage with colleagues in meaningful conversations about our work alongside students proved to be distressing.

As a doctoral student. Entering into a space created by the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development (CRTED), I was introduced to a research community that seeks to bridge difference not by flattening experience, but through courting resonances, ambiguity, and attending to multiplicities. Nested in this larger community an idea was born amongst four women of diverse heritage, working within different disciplines, and embodying (Johnson, 1989) a range of research interests, to gather as a response community of beginning narrative inquirers³ (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), in essence, to co-compose a counterstory (Lindemann Nelson, 1995) of professional development. This entailed a shift of the institutional narrative of what professional development *ought* to look like to one of sustaining possibility, whereby one had the authority to speak her mind without fear of reprisal from a space of safety. Within this relational space, I found solace in being able to speak, respond, and listen in mutually honourable ways. Here, not only the easy or so-called good stories could be shared, but also ones which, “if people move away and do not listen we may forever feel disconnected” (Paley, 1999, p. 59). These are stories which may strike emotional chords, bringing forth points of views that may not concur with one another. When this happens, rather than silencing conversation, Dorit, Hiroko, Muna, and I work within these complex feelings so to better learn from each other and to *not* privilege one person’s knowing over another. The pressure to conform to monolithic ways of being, what could be an exclusionary exercise, does not exist in this space. Bateson’s (1989) search for a term that could “assert collegiality and the fact

the process is made possible by our differences” (p. 102), illuminates the significance in speaking from “a knowing rooted in experience” (hooks, 1994, p. 90). In this chosen community⁴ (Lindemann Nelson, 1995), I have learned, “friends guide and learn from each other, especially in unexplored terrain” (Bateson, 1989, p. 103).

Living in a Chosen Community Means Growing Professionally

In accentuating Greene’s (1992) passage earlier in this piece, I reflect on how identity-making within differing communities across time, has storied me personally and professionally. In doing so, I tried to give a sense of how markedly a chosen community on a particular university landscape has endowed me, a female of colour, with a safe space to speak, listen, and learn. As Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) thoughtfully articulate, “These lived and told stories and the talk about the stories are one of the ways that we fill our world with meaning and enlist one another’s assistance in building lives and communities” (p. 35). As we four colleagues and friends build community, central to our narrative inquiries is a heartfelt commitment to human rights as lived out in our respective research puzzles (see: Kubota, 2014; Menon, 2015; Redlich-Amirav, 2015, Saleh, 2014). Equally crucial, this commitment is interwoven in our relations to one another, colleagues, participants, family, and friends. Grounded in a reciprocity of care, these are stories which we have come to recognize as nested within our chosen community and alongside one another, stories which transcend, (re)imagine (Sarbin, 2004), and (re)invent what it means to engage in professional development as equals, as humans whose voices do matter. It is Lorde (1984/2007) who intuitively imparts, “Community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist” (p. 113). Daringly then, much like Huber et al. (2013), we continue to hope and dream, and we envision “possibilities for storying and restorying ourselves and one another into being; we wonder about new kinds of, or maybe forgotten or written over, obligations and ways of interacting and responding to and with one another” (p. 216).

Hiroko: Knocking the Door and Entering Into a “Home”

I was living in a silence when I first came to Canada. What should I do? Whom can I talk to? Where do I belong to? These were questions I recurrently asked myself at that moment. Prochnic (2011) states that silence is rooted in an expression of interrupted action. My voice was engulfed by silence, which took me out from “the space of appearance” (Arendt, 1958, p. 199).

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When I first arrived at the airport in January 2008, I realized that my suitcases were lost. This was my first day of coming to Edmonton to start a graduate program in the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Alberta. I was full of hope and ambition to start a new journey when saying goodbye to my family at the airport in Japan. This was my first time living abroad, so I put everything in my two big suitcases: clothes, books, photos, pens, snacks, soap, and so on. My two suitcases were packed with things familiar to me and were my home for me at that moment. I waited at the baggage lane with mixed emotions of excitement and anxiety. One by one, I became the only one waiting for luggage. When I found out that my suitcases were missing, I felt a hint of sadness starting to soak into my body. To shake this off, I ran out of the airport into the snowy bus stop to head towards a house where I rented a basement. I knocked at the door; I entered into a cold, empty basement with a small shoulder bag.

A few days later, I attended my first class. However, after the class, I decided to drop all my courses because I was unable to follow the discussions in English. I was overwhelmed by the complexities of the new language and the new terminologies I had never heard before. Above all, I was discouraged by my ability to listen to and speak English. In dismay, I wondered if I had to quit the program and go back to Japan. A hint of sadness finally penetrated into my body and was further developed into more realistic feelings of disappointment, fear, and uncertainty. I could not sleep that night, fighting with an invisible fear of isolation and disconnection from my home, my family, and anything familiar to me. This was my first experience of coming to Canada, characterized by the silence of interruption.

After several months of English study, I returned to my program. I was still struggling with both the language and feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. My identity was challenged as I felt awkward whenever I was unable to find a word in English. My stories of myself and the continuity of my life experiences seemed to have been interrupted since I had come to Canada. For me, my past and future did not appear to be linked at the horizon of the present moment (Kerby, 1991). Although the environments in Canada have become more familiar to me, I did not feel a sense of belonging here. I kept knocking on doors trying to find "home."⁵

Since I started my doctoral program, I have attended a weekly meeting called "Research Issues," offered by the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development (CRTED). This is a response community where narrative inquirers learn about the methodology and learn to attend to stories in relational and responsive ways (Clandinin & Caine, 2012). Several months later, I met Dorit; she is also a PhD student studying the same methodology of narrative inquiry. After we had a short conversation

at Research Issues, we decided to talk more about narrative inquiry. This was our first meeting. We met once a week at a place called Hope House on campus, discussing the methodology, sharing our wonders and questions, and sending articles to each other to learn more about narrative inquiry. As we were both international students and taking the candidacy exam in several months, we could understand the feelings of frustration and vulnerability very well. I eventually felt more comfortable and safe to share stories with her.

Shortly after, Muna and Jinny joined us. We are a group of PhD students studying narrative inquiry and are in about the same stage of our programs despite being in different disciplines. The four of us started to meet weekly at Hope House. With a cup of coffee and snacks, we comfortably sat around a round table and shared our stories and writings. We came alongside each other and carefully listened to stories by travelling to each other's worlds with loving perception (Lugones, 1987). I travelled many places back and forth within their stories, which also encouraged me to retell and relive my own life stories (Clandinin, 2013).

Our space has quickly become a nested community where we all feel safe, loved, and nurtured. Within our nested community, my voice was finally released out of the silence and listened to by others. When I retold my lived and told stories, my interrupted past and present seemed to regain a momentum to be linked again. This temporal continuity allowed me to change and grow in educative ways (Dewey, 1938/1997). This nested community was created by a sense of care; its members always gave me encouragement and positive feedback, which helped me understand who I was, who I am, and who I am becoming (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Thus, it is an important community where we all learn together and it is also a home where we feel a sense of belonging and acceptance. I knocked on the door at Hope House and finally entered "home," which was a significant transition for me both academically and personally.

As I moved from the silence of interruption into the warmth of our nested community, I came to truly appreciate the significance of being in a community and being able to express myself to others. Arendt (1958) emphasizes that human plurality is actualized by action and speech, which makes each human being unique and distinct. Disclosure of identity to others is significant in two ways: first it verifies the agency of human beings expressed through action and speech, and second, it demonstrates the "human togetherness" (p. 180) in which people are with others, not against them. Speech and action also meaningfully symbolize the concept of inception with which only human beings can introduce something new to the world, owing to their distinctiveness and human connectedness. Therefore, the fundamental element of the human condition is

that human beings should be able to act and speak in the space of appearance, with a sense of agency and autonomy, which validates their very existence as a unique individual who can mark an initiation to the world.

Dorit: Opening the Door Into a “Home”

Every time we meet I have this feeling

Feeling of hope inside my body...

This is our third meeting at Hope House on campus at the University of Alberta.

I wonder about our meeting today, and butterflies are living in my belly as I am thinking about sharing my story. Is my story too hard to digest? Maybe today I will only listen to others. Maybe I will share only part of my story. These wonders are living within me.

In a couple of minutes my friends will arrive.

As I open the front door at Hope House

I am still wondering about what to share.

As Hiroko, Muna, and Jinny arrive I feel happy and hopeful.

The butterflies leave and instead I feel something more solid in my belly, I feel longing and belonging, a feeling of home.

With smiles on their faces they arrive at the Hope library room and settle down around the round table. At the same time as they sit around the table I feel this thing called hope in my body. I feel this trust between us and a sense of home.

I love this gathering. I learn so much, and I know they will listen carefully to my story.

I know they will initiate a dialogue and I will be inspired by their feedback.

Imagining these feelings of togetherness with Muna, Jinny, and Hiroko allow me to feel at home. “There is another sense in which learning can be coming home, for the process of learning turns a strange context into a familial one, and finally into a habituation of mind and heart” (Bateson, 1994, p. 213). For me, it became a relational learning space. It became a space of caring that enhanced my sense of trust, safety, and confidence. In this safe place, I started to recollect memories and further developed my research wonderings. This opportunity enabled me to look back into my vulnerable stories in an ongoing relational learning process. Dewey (1938/1997) defines a learning process through experience as the intersection of “continuity” and “interaction” between the personal, social, and material environment, and maintains that “every experience is a moving force” (p. 31). Dewey’s attention to the intertwining of continuity, interaction, and situation is an unfolding process of experience. The relational experience that encompasses knowledge and context shapes identity—as Connelly and Clandinin (1999) further explain about the concept of “stories to

live by”—where knowledge and context are connected to identity. As Clandinin and Huber (2002) eloquently wrote,

For us, identity is a storied life composition, a story to live by. Stories to live by are shaped in places and lived in places. They live in actions, in relationships with others, in language, including silences, in gaps and vacancies, in continuities and discontinuities. (pp. 161–162)

Muna, Jinny, Hiroko, and I came with our curiosity and hesitations. Our response community of narrative inquirers (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) became a nested community, a home for our “stories to live by.”

I would like to share how our group has developed and where it all started. When I first came into the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development (CRTED) at the University of Alberta, I participated in weekly Research Issues, a gathering attended by graduate students, visiting and resident faculty, as well as other members of the community. I hesitated to talk and share as I came from a different country, from a different culture, and from a different discipline. As the only occupational therapist, I was shy, scared, and did not know what to share. With these feelings in my heart, I came every Tuesday afternoon to the Research Issues table— not because I thought it was expected of me—but because I wanted to learn what it is to be a narrative inquirer.

In this ongoing meeting of diverse lives and experiences, members inquire into their stories and shape possibilities of composing identities as researchers. For me, this gathering allows me to lovingly travel back to another time and place in my past. I traveled back to high school, to a time where I learned relationally. I remember when I started grade seven at the Agriculture Boarding School in Israel, knowing nobody there: I felt alone and did not know how to start building relationships. As I arrived in the middle of the year, I was shy and quiet. One of my classmates asked me if I would like to join her and some other friends when they study for the history exam. I immediately said “yes!” I was happy and excited as it represented a small hope for the beginning of a relationship. This invitation was an uplifting experience of belonging. At that time, I could not imagine how this relational way of learning was shaping and reshaping who I was and who I was becoming. For me, it was the start of a long-term relationship that allowed me to shape stories that I lived. This experience shaped my identity as a student in high school, and still shapes who I am and who I am becoming. These moments of belonging, and sense of hope and home, came to me again when we started to carefully compose our nested community.

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During my doctoral studies, I find myself again in this process of developing a nested community with Jinny, Muna, and Hiroko, my beloved community. I feel the same way I did in high school once again. I feel my thinking expanding as I live alongside my friends. Memories of my past coming into my mind fills me with excitement. As Dewey (1938/1997) helps me to learn, past experience shapes future experience. My three friends are part of my becoming as a narrative inquirer. They help me to feel my vulnerabilities, and at the same time they help me to trust with confidence, and open up a place and a space for more stories in the making. With their understanding and carefully listening, I was able to develop my narrative beginnings for my proposal as a doctoral student. We continue to build our nested community very carefully over time. This way of living alongside my friends became a part of who I am and part of my identity.

It is a couple of months that we are meeting together, once a week at Hope House. Hope House is part of the university. It is an old wood building with a Hope library. At the library, there is a round table with chairs, and many books, journals, and dissertations about hope. In this place with a hopeful atmosphere, it is like being at home. This feeling of home reminds me of what Caine (2010) thoughtfully articulates about narrative beginnings, about home as place(s) and the interconnections within her memory. The way she carried her memory of home provided her with a sense of belonging. For me, our place at Hope House became a space of hope.

Farran, Herth, and Popovich (1995) describe a relational hope process as the heart of hope, which enables people to give hope to each other by the ability to lovingly travel to each other's worlds (Lugones, 1987). For my understanding, the process of who we are and who we are becoming is a process of hope. It is a process of hope because "hope breathes life into the human spirit. With hope, human beings strive for and strengthen their capacities for growth and change" (Koenig & Spano, 2007, p. 46). Many times, Jinny, Muna, and Hiroko function as sources of hope for me. During this process of my doctoral work, which encompasses tensions, ambiguity, and loneliness in general, studying in a different language makes this process even more complicated. Coming from a different culture, and a different language, also fills me with tensions, fears, and uncertainties. When these feelings of fear arrive and thoughts about the amount of strength needed to overcome this process intrude, sharing difficulties and being willing to listen become paramount. Dufault and Martocchio (1985) relate hope to an external process where other people are able to promote, engender, and sustain hope when the individual's own hope resources seem to be depleted. Indeed, our connectedness within our nested community expresses mutual dependence, intimacy, shared hopes, and a sense of belonging. Like Bateson (1994), I feel that "discovering the connections

and regularities within knowledge you already have is another kind of homecoming, a recognition that feels like a glorious game or a profound validation” (pp. 205–206). It is very meaningful for me to learn, and grow, through intimate connections with close friends, our nested community. This community is a homecoming, a feeling of togetherness and care where we don’t really know what life will bring us, and we would like to be open to surprise (Lugones, 1987). As we are traveling to each other’s world, we have the full meaning of who we are and who we are becoming.

Muna: Awakening to Doors of Possibility...

“Community means you can be yourself” (Paley, 1995, p. 97)

Smiling as soon as I see them, I embrace my friends and works-in-progress group members with a combination of joy and relief. We have agreed to meet this week at Hope House and I am feeling very much in need of hope as I move forward in my doctoral program. My candidacy exam will be taking place in a few weeks and I am feeling the sharp edges of anxiety as time encroaches upon the space between me and my upcoming exam date. I wonder if this anxiety shows as I sit at my usual spot at the small wooden table. I think that it must because my friends seem to look intently at me as they ask how I am doing. Taking a deep breath, I start to share ...

This story fragment of a moment lived alongside my works-in-progress group friends invites me to contemplate the many profound and embodied shifts I have experienced in composing my life as a woman, mother, curriculum-maker (Huber et al., 2011), graduate student, and narrative inquirer (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) over the past year. Almost a year ago, Hiroko, Dorit, Jinny, and I felt that it would be a good idea to try meeting once a week as we were all in the midst of engaging in writing proposals, approaching candidacy exams, and/or commencing doctoral research projects. We were already acquainted through our work alongside one another in doctoral courses and in the weekly Research Issues group meetings at the University of Alberta’s (U of A) Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development (CRTED) when we discussed the possibility of extending this relational knowing through a weekly works-in-progress group. I am thankful that we acted upon this possibility—our group has become one of my most cherished sustaining stories (Lopez, 1990; Paley, 1997) as I continue to compose my life alongside colleagues, family, friends, and research participants.

While we most often engage in works-in-progress meetings at Hope House, the physical location of our discussions has shifted to many other places. We have Skyped

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with members who were conducting their research abroad, and we have also met in coffee shops and at the CRTED. While the physical locale of our discussions undoubtedly shapes what we choose to share at any given moment, Heidegger's concept of dwelling reminds me that spaces are permeated with meaning largely because of the relationships nurtured within them: "Dwelling is said to consist in the multiple 'lived relationships' that people maintain with places, for it is solely by virtue of these relationships that space acquires meaning" (as cited in Basso, 1996, p. 106). Our chosen community (Lindemann Nelson, 1995) nested within a multiplicity of communities, is so much more than *where* we happen to be meeting. Infinitely more profound is *who we are and who we are becoming* as people and professionals alongside one another in these spaces.

Bateson (1989) reminds me that "specific everyday tasks can be life-giving, binding individuals to each other and to the past. They can also be opened up as areas of choice, becoming the building blocks of identity" (p. 131). While I am drawn to many parts of Bateson's assertion, my attention (re)turns again and again to the idea that certain activities "bind individuals to each other and to the past" and how these activities contribute to identity-making. These words resonate strongly for me because, like Caine (2010), I "realize that in the midst of seeking a new story to live by, each story will always begin with my past" (p. 1304). Every time Hiroko, Dorit, Jinny, and I choose to meet, we embody our diverse lived narratives, including personal, cultural, social, institutional, relational, linguistic, religious, and familial stories (Clandinin, 2013) planted within us at some point in the continuum of our life compositions. I am very mindful of this as a Canadian-born Muslim woman, educator, and student of Palestinian heritage. However, while my friends and I are different in terms of our personal (her)stories, we are building our (chosen) community and our identities alongside one another in multilayered and profound ways with our relational tellings and re-tellings (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As Greene (1992) so poignantly elucidated:

To open up our experience (and, yes, our curricula) to existential possibilities of multiple kinds is to extend and deepen what we think of when we speak of a community. If we break through and even disrupt a surface equilibrium and uniformity, this does not mean that particular ethnic or racial traditions ought to replace our own. (p. 254)

Our works-in-progress group has allowed me to travel to the myriad worlds (Lugones, 1987) we each inhabit and traverse, allowing me to see and feel from vantage points that would not have been possible otherwise, whilst simultaneously honouring my embodied experiential knowing.

Reflecting upon our conversations over the last year, and the story fragment I shared at the beginning of this piece, I resonate strongly with Morris' (2002) emphasis on the profoundly moral undercurrent of stories. Drawing upon Coles (1989), Morris (2002) asserted that sharing personal and professional experiences "incur an obligation on the listener. Such stories exert a kind of 'call'" (p. 197). My friends have encouraged me to inquire into my lived and told stories in ways that have made visible spaces to emerge for re-telling and re-living these stories as a woman, curriculum-maker, and student alongside others. As a narrative inquirer in the making, this chosen community helps me to relationally live what Downey and Clandinin (2010) emphasized when they noted, "Narrative inquiry understands any situation as nested within an almost endless array of other situations and, rather than sort them out, seeks to understand and explore the layers of complexity involved in living a life" (p. 388).

Our discussions are not without tensions. There are times when I feel uncomfortable with, or uncertain about, what I am sharing or attending to for a multitude of reasons. However, as Clandinin, Lessard, and Caine (2012) remind me,

Conversational spaces are not spaces to exchange and confirm already familiar understandings, but, rather, are characterized by emergent occasions for exploring other possible stories. They are relational spaces characterized by mutuality and possibility, where embodied, lived tensions become resources or triggers for telling and retelling stories. (p. 18)

Indeed, within the tensions I experience at times, liminal spaces (Heilbrun, 1999), spaces rife with both unsteadiness and possibility whereby stories can be retold and relived with imagination and improvisation (Bateson, 1989), often become visible. Looking forward, and thinking of the many shifts that have occurred and will continue to occur as we engage in this work together, I am reminded of Kerby's (1991) statement that "the unfolding of time is the unfolding of our history" (p. 19) ... and I wonder what our co-composed (her)story will bring over time ...

Conclusion

As we turn our gazes forward, we imagine possibilities in sharing our multiple perspectives through our unique voices (Ely, 2007). We continue to metaphorically play with opened, ajar, and closed doorways as liminal spaces (Heilbrun, 1999) in personal and professional development. Together, in the midst of these storied archways, we embrace the multiplicity of our lived stories as beginning narrative inquirers.

Notes

1. Guided by the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space of temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), we engage in autobiographical narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013; Saleh, Menon, & Clandinin, 2014) into our lived stories alongside one another. As both phenomena and methodology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), narrative inquiry is theoretically grounded in Dewey's (1938/1997) philosophy of experience as education and Schwab's (1973) concept of the practical in education.
2. A 'world,' Lugones (1987) elucidated, "need not be a construction of a whole society. It may be a construction of a tiny portion of a particular society. . . Some 'worlds' are bigger than others" (p. 10).
3. While we engage in autobiographical narrative inquiry for this paper, we are each in the midst of coming alongside diverse research participants for our respective narrative inquiries.
4. A community of choice, Lindemann Nelson (1995) explicates, can provide a space by which its members "can tell self-defining stories" (p. 28).
5. In my doctoral research, I inquire into the experiences of people who are homeless in Japan, with a focus on how a sense of home was/is constructed—in mind and physically—before and after becoming homeless, and how they experienced the transitions of 'home' (Kubota, 2014).

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The Ed.D. as Investment in Professional Development: Cultivating Practitioner Knowledge

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ABSTRACT

As teacher educators and participants in the US-based Carnegie Project for the Education Doctorate (CPED) initiative to differentiate the Ed.D/Ph.D., we have programmatic commitments to the centrality of practitioner knowledge for shaping professional development. Through CPED, we structure opportunities for local educators to develop their professional practices within their graduate studies toward an Ed.D, while maintaining full-time educational work commitments. Concurrently, we examine and document how CPED creates room, alongside concrete practice, to cultivate, promote, and value the voices, sensibilities, and capacities of practitioners engaged in advanced practices. In doing so, we confront marginalization of practitioners' perspectives in the field and seek conditions and supports that insist on educators' primary role in the complex project of education worldwide.

"[F]or the good of ourselves and our students, I believe that teachers must become part of the research conversations and policy creation surrounding education. Teacher research makes what we do, why we do it, and how it works visible and justifies it to ourselves and to others. It provides specific and situated cases. Without teacher voices, grounded in experience and clear-eyed interpretations of the data in our classrooms, policies will not be fully informed, and implementations will be inefficient."

(Wilhelm, 2008, p. 55)

This account challenges persistent worldwide views in the field of education that conceive of practitioner knowledge through deficit lenses (see overview in Townsend & Bates, 2007). The impoverished de-professionalization concerning teaching and teacher education that results from such deficit lenses trivializes associated views of what teaching entails and the applicability of educators' lived understandings to their own practice. These matters trouble us and have brought us together for more than five years, collaborating on a practitioner-centric Education Doctorate (Ed.D.) program.

Shulman (2004) has drawn attention to the hazards of dismissing/overlooking practitioner knowledge. In his words, "The currently incomplete and trivial definitions of teaching held by the policy community comprise a far greater danger to good education than does a more serious attempt to formulate the knowledge base" (p. 243). Written over a decade ago when Shulman also helped found the national Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED), his words are even more urgent now. CPED, which has supported many campuses in the United States in differentiating the Ed.D. and the Ph.D., operates as a counter-narrative to the larger trajectory that Shulman decries. In turn, CPED has afforded us as participants in this project an opportunity to collaborate on efforts to affirm and grow educators' practitioner knowledge.

Although varying by site, CPED prompts participants to structure meaningful opportunities for educators to develop their professional practice within the course of their Ed.D. studies while maintaining full-time teaching and/or related commitments. Through examining the concrete experiences of our own institutional efforts as colleagues in the same department from 2005 to 2012, we reflect on how this initiative positioned us and our Ed.D. students to cultivate and to articulate practitioner knowledge while giving shape to a distinct new program. The shape our Ed.D. program has taken acknowledges the formative nature of professional development and its generative potential for creating rich learning experiences and changed pedagogy for all involved.

To clarify our own roles in relation to both CPED and as coauthors, in the institutional home we shared for eight years, we have been the initiator (Macintyre Latta), program coordinator (Wunder), and three-time teacher (Hamann) of the first course that Ed.D. students encounter in our program. We are varyingly and complementarily prepared and professionally oriented in curriculum studies (Macintyre Latta), social studies education (Wunder), and the anthropology of education and educational policy (Hamann). Our arguments are grounded mainly in our experiences (including student feedback) from the initiation of our department's CPED participation in 2007 through 2012.

CPED offers national commitments that incubate, inform, and protect the more local pathways that we helped co-create on our campus to embed programmatic structures, supports, and resources that prioritize practitioner knowledge. Our story of process documents the search for meaningful opportunities for educators to develop their professional practice within the course of their graduate studies alongside their continuing full-time teaching and other professional commitments. We field-tested course experiences where educators' practices could be developed and nurtured. Such experiences valued interdisciplinarity, multiple methodological perspectives, and interactions and deliberations across participants' interests and content areas. We grappled with programmatic questions such as: What are the principles, pedagogies, and core features that shape our potential Ed.D. graduates' investment in their professional knowledge? We confronted questions concerning graduates' changing identities as they moved through their studies (akin to those shared by Wilhelm [2008]). For example: How might Ed.D. graduates challenge traditional disciplinary and institutional structures, strive for connections between and amongst disciplines, demand continuous engagement in reflection and deliberation, and honor teaching and learning as complex, creative, and developmental in nature? What might be the lived consequences of this posture for teachers, learners, and curriculum in the short and long term?

Our challenge for CPED program design led us to see value in investing in the kind of practitioner knowledge that would allow for the formation of educators entrusted with furthering learning within and from their varied contexts of teaching/learning experiences. We saw the cultivation of practitioners' professional knowledge as fundamental, given the inherent complexities that educators encounter in P-16 classrooms and community teaching/learning settings. Similarly, we believed that the interchange of knowledge—that is, sustained problem-solving communication between advanced practitioners (Hamann, 2005)—would be generative both for developing new knowledge and reiterating practice as a site of expertise. Our program investment purposefully oriented our version of CPED toward scholars of educational practice, creating the necessary spaces where educators' practices could be developed and nurtured, problems of practice examined as challenges and opportunities, and greater agency claimed by educators for furthering learning (their own, that of their colleagues and professors, and that of their students).

Collectively, 12 faculty members in our Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education envisioned an intellectually rigorous and contextually relevant program of study in which educators would create and sustain effective teaching/learning contexts that fittingly responded to the concrete realities of P-16 classrooms

and community educational settings. Our resulting program attracted educators interested in teacher education, professional development, and teacher-leader and advocacy positions in educational venues of all kinds. As a whole, the program conceptualizes the scholarship of teaching as “both substance and process,” and as being critical to educators who can “analyze, evaluate, and—most important—model and teach practice to future and current active teachers” (Shulman, Golde, Conklin Bueschel, & Garabedian, 2006, p. 30) in a cross section of educational settings. Our conceptualization has relied on educators to be actively engaged in their professional working environments while concomitantly exploring theories, ideologies, and applications in conversations with peers and faculty. Documenting these efforts to value and grow practitioner knowledge across six years and three doctoral cohorts, intersecting questions continually arise for all involved such as:

- What is entailed in being a professional practitioner?
- What constitutes practitioner knowledge?
- How does practitioner knowledge relate to other forms of educational knowledge?
- Why and how is practitioner knowledge related to policy/practice/research concerns? Does it challenge the privileging of “research” or “policy” perspectives?
- What are the principles, pedagogies, and core features committed to practitioner knowledge that shape our graduate program in teacher education and could shape others?
- Why and how does practitioner knowledge challenge research orthodoxies, and disciplinary and institutional structures?
- What are the implications for education policies, education practices, and the futures envisioned for local communities alongside national and international impacts?

We increasingly see these questions as holding the substance fundamental to both defining and illustrating the value, complexity, and nuance of practitioner knowledge. So we have pursued processes for investing in the kind of practitioner knowledge that continues the formation of educators who can voice and respond to ever-changing teaching/learning contexts (including shifting educational policy milieus) with the necessary insights to promote genuine inquiry-based learning (their own and that of their students and colleagues).

Programmatically, we find that the questions, processes, and commitments shaping the CPED initiative in our institution have asked educators to continually discern what they are doing and why within their professional settings and how they presume to know. In doing so, it reveals to all involved the importance of attending to the formative

nature of practitioner knowledge from initial teacher education to more advanced inquiry in doctoral studies. Such professional knowledge, entailing both the substance and process of inquiry, serves as the necessary ground for professional development that invests in teachers' voices, sensibilities, and capacities to build, nurture, and sustain worthwhile learning experiences. In turn, we surmise that such ground will instill the experiential conditions that speak back to the impoverished contemporary interpretations dominating many professional development initiatives (see for example, Day, 2000; Easton, 2008; Lieberman & Pointer-Mace, 2008; Richardson, 2003; Trachtman, 2007). Thus, an inquiry stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) is at the heart of educator professional development and needs to be modeled and practiced on a continuous basis.

Finding A Way To Proceed

Borko (2004) notes that the characteristics of design-based research are very fitting for examining educators' professional development and processes. These have permeated our efforts from the first syllabus of the very first course in which our Ed.D. cohort engaged. These efforts attend to the substance and process of our programmatic inquiry into the formative nature of practitioner knowledge from within the conduct of the inquiry itself. Design-based research fittingly aims to improve educational practices through iterative analysis and implementation derived through collaborations across researchers and practitioners fostering contextually sensitive ways to proceed (Wang & Hannafin, 2005). Design-based research also serves as a guide as we document our institutional efforts to create, implement, and redesign the graduate teacher education program that leads to the Ed.D. In short then, design research describes both our efforts to create, shape, and then reshape a practitioner-oriented Ed.D. program and much of the content with which we engage these practitioner graduate students (so that they can use design research frameworks as they identify, investigate, and then respond to a problem of practice during the program and afterward).

In January 2009, the first cohort enrolled in our program with most earning their doctorates by August 2012. In January 2011, a second cohort matriculated into our Ed.D. program that retained many but not all of its original features. A third cohort matriculated in January 2013 (again encountering adaptations and revisions) and, the cycle continues. Revisions include ways of figuring out how to have earlier cohorts interact with more recent ones, but the core premises of building cohorts and establishing practitioner-affirming habits of interaction have stayed constant.

Our account is that of conjoint designers, researchers, and reflective teacher practitioners. We are not the students in this program, but we have been and are the advisors of many of them and the professors of more. Participating programmatic CPED faculty meet regularly, operating both as researchers and practitioners designing and redesigning the Ed.D. program guided by five interrelated characteristics of design-based research. First, the issues and considerations that form the substance of our design meetings emphasize the pragmatics of theory/practice relationships on an ongoing basis. We become evermore cognizant of the importance of mutual development and participation by all involved in our programmatic design throughout the process. In this way, the design pragmatically enacts and refines theory/practice relations continuously (Cobb, Confrey, diSessa, Lehrer, & Schauble, 2003; Edelson, 2002; van den Akker, 1999). Second, the substance of our design meetings is grounded in both theory and the concrete realities of practice (Wang & Hannafin, 2005). The evolving programmatic context surfaces the complexities, dynamics, and limitations of practice forming the relational intersections that generate and elaborate our theorizing process throughout. Collaboration becomes integral to the cyclical design and redesign nature. So, third, interaction and deliberation are key features of the iterative and flexible structure understood to be always in the making. The recursive movement that ensues within the design process allows for programmatic flexibility. And, participating faculty come to appreciate how time together intentionally moving from analysis-to-design-to-reflection-and-redesign makes visible the programmatic strengths alongside the needed changes, creating room for continual refinement (Bannan-Ritland, 2003; Design-Based Research Collective, 2003). Fourth, the multiple perspectives and involvements of both our faculty team and the Ed.D. students ensure integration of data sources, methods of data collection, and analysis of procedures that are interdependent with the needs of the program. We are thus relationally accountable to each other as the documentation of our efforts reveals a body of evidence that supports the practices and directions taken (Macintyre Latta & Field, 2005; Carr, 2000; Sidorkin, 2002). And, fifth, context intentionally connects the design process with our findings as the inquiry is conducted; embracing the in situ particularities entailed every step of the way. So, methodologically, our inquiry is also a case study. Our careful programmatic documentation aims to be of service to other institutions' efforts to redesign their doctoral studies in education by offering opportunities for them to examine findings in relation to their own contexts and needs, adapting for their own purposes (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2003).

For programmatic design and revision purposes, as well as to participate in and contribute to national CPED events, we have created policy documents, including recruitment materials, program design materials, syllabi, comprehensive exam

guidance, and practice-oriented dissertation examples. One data source then for this paper is this evolving textual artifact record of what we have done and per what logics. Yet, an adequate portrayal of this program *as enacted*, what it really has been vis-à-vis participants' experiences, requires also examining collected accounts from students and faculty. These include representative artifacts of student course work, questionnaire responses from students, electronic discussion boards, published chapters documenting aspects of the program as directly experienced by faculty and students, and minutes from CPED faculty meetings.

Data collection and analysis operate both inductively and deductively throughout, providing means to address the interfaces among the empirical data collected, its interpretations, the research literature, and the design process taking shape. Our search for programmatic experiences that cultivate practitioner knowledge as "both substance and process" positions all involved in this inquiry to do the same. And, it is the concomitant attention toward substance and process that characterizes the unfolding inquiry and our analysis as a whole. Over four cohorts, this inquiry becomes "an ongoing project of configuring description and theory into larger patterns" (Nespor, 2006, p. 298). The ground we encounter is patterned again and again by a growing vocabulary to voice practitioner knowledge, heighten sensibilities toward learners/learning, and enlarge capacities to cultivate the needed circumstances for genuine learning contexts. Attention now turns to these patterns "in ways that maximize opportunities to extend patterns, discover new elements, and multiply connections among elements" (p. 300). Representative CPED student voices/words illustrate these patterns, with permissions in place for all included data.

Cultivating Educators' Voices

The imposed, top-down, and purportedly research-based education policies that emphasize high stakes testing in education have not improved student achievement, equity, and professional working conditions (Proefriedt, 2008; Ravitch, 2010, 2013). And, yet, practitioners continue to be typically controlled and restricted by such efforts, rather than seen as agentive sources of important insight best positioned to foster improvements at their sites of practice. As we meet our Ed.D. cohort students, what they reveal to us as constituting their practitioner knowledge reflects this tension. Educators endeavor to articulate what is being undermined or lost altogether as they find themselves relaying their teaching practices in limiting ways that under-analyze, decontextualize, and reduce practitioner knowledge to instructional methods and tools disassociated from the particulars of content, students, and situation (Chan, 2012; Heaton & Swidler, 2012; McGowan & Pedersen, 2012). For example, a third-cohort Ed.D.

student, in considering Eisner's (1992) contention that, "if the curriculum is the systole of education, teaching is the diastole. No curriculum teaches itself and how it is mediated is crucial" (p. 624), explained in his second week in the program:

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is the tool created to make sure that the new curriculum, which was developed as a part of the standards movement, is not only being taught but is being learned by students. The accountability that NCLB is supposed to provide and what it actually produces represents the dichotomy Eisner identified as "the intended curriculum and the operational curriculum." Schools are pressed to improve scores on state mandated tests that are primarily machine scored. Multiple choice test items are ineffective measures of the skills and the abilities that students are going to need to be successful in a globalized, post-high school world...

Our Ed.D. students have a pragmatic, but also skeptical perspective on the U.S. preoccupation with the "what works" education agenda. The quote above represents the dilemma while grappling for an agentive response. Even with this analysis, educators may assume a compliant mode (Groundwater Smith & Mockler, 2009), although the act of pursuing an Ed.D. may represent an effort to figure out ways to push back against this dominant paradigm.

There have been many critiques of the muffling compliancy of the "what works" agenda over the years (e.g., Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006; Glass, 1987, 2008; Imig & Imig, 2006; Labaree, 2000, 2010; Noddings, 1992; Shulman, 1998/2004; Stedman, 2010, 2011). The reduction of professional action to purported causes and effects only, oversimplifies the policy and practice discourses concerning education (Biesta, 2007). Alongside other education researchers (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009), Biesta (2007) explains that a reason politicians (and many other stakeholders) worldwide are so enamored with "what works" is the seduction of promised quick educational fixes translated into concrete means or strategies with measureable outcomes. But politicians and many other education stakeholders are not teachers. Though not necessarily fully sure about where to go or how to proceed, the orientation of incoming CPED practitioners matches well with our Ed.D programmatic coursework to build a language that confronts the silver-bullet fallacy, arguing instead for a central role for enlarging and deepening practitioner knowledge.

Au (2010) has provocatively outlined the orientation of the dominant practitioner-dismissing paradigm in three (unsettling) "lessons learned": (1) Teachers are not competent; (2) Diversity is bad; and (3) Local conditions are unimportant. Confronting how these assumptions impact our Ed.D students' daily lives as educators is indeed

unsettling. Collectively interrogating what is unsettled and why, surfaces specifics about how the “what works” education agenda unproductively stifles particular perspectives and disregards educator expertise. Yet, our stance cannot be just to lament the status quo. Given the practitioners’ continuing work as practitioners (and their investment in that identity), they cannot easily walk away (nor do they or we want them to). Instead, the idea is to persevere in the face of this dominant understanding and to push back against it. This is not easy work, which makes the solidarity of our cohort design additionally important.

Still, the impoverished account of practitioner knowledge resonates with and weighs heavily on our Ed.D students as their programs of study unfold. Another third cohort student compared professional development initiatives at two schools where he worked as follows:

[T]here is a part of me that felt like an in service allowed somebody to say they were doing their job...the administrator... hired some expert to come in and “teach” us. This happened at night during study hall (7:30 - 9:30) in a room with far too comfortable chairs when we all had other things to be doing. The person would get up and talk about “power words” or some such thing and give us handouts. After it was over we were on our own. Never heard about it again. It was very hard to be anything other than annoyed by these, and the odd part is I feel the head of school knew we were unhappy to participate.

Describing his current public position, he acknowledges that the conditions were better:

At [my current school] there is more thought put into in service. A full day is given to the in service, and it is led by colleagues,... revisited 4 times during the year. I feel like there is more practical information given...But there is no monitored follow up regarding implementation.

Yet, the last line still troubles both its author (our CPED student) and us. In that line there is an uncomfortable echo of Au’s (2010) worry that teachers are not competent or reliable to implement better practices on their own. The paradox that we think our student is trying to articulate here is his discomfort with a compliance mentality alongside his concurrent worry that something is lost or opportunities and efficacy are missed if compliance or enactment is not expected. Responses by more classmates in the same discussion chain reveal that they too struggle with the same tensions or contradictions.

Most of the research literature on teacher professional development does not consider this vexation, this practitioner restlessness of agreeing with some of what they are subjected to, but disagreeing with other parts and trying to figure out what a better “third way” might be. Instead, the professional literature is replete with depictions of professional development initiatives focused on “evidence-based practices” and concerned with pre-determined learning outcomes. In these accounts teachers are “good” if they heed the professional advice and bad if they do not. Yet, as the practitioners just quoted reveal, actual professional development delivered in actual settings is not so neat and clean. The dominant literature then, like the dominant practices it supports, is impoverished in that it is missing the perspectives of restless committed teachers.

Our CPED students’ practice is not without echo in the research literature. With our mediation, Ed.D cohort students join the larger conversation through the research literature (or that portion of it not entangled with the dominant paradigm), challenging why teachers are provided with curricular materials as if they are incapable of making educational decisions, and reconsidering why providing measurable results that fit fixed ends is too often inadequate (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Day, 2000, 2004; Delpit, 2000; Dunne, 2005; Easton, 2008; Fullan, 1999; Hargreaves, 2002; Loughran, 2010; Noddings, 1996; Olson & Craig, 2001; Richardson, 2003; Trachtman, 2007). Kemmis and Smith’s (2008) characterization of de-professionalization practices that endanger practitioner knowledge finds accord with Ed.D cohort students as they grapple with ways to exercise professional judgments within particular teaching/learning situations. They are increasingly aware of how the disregard for professional judgments devalues their expertise and depersonalizes teaching practices (Kincheloe, Slattery, & Steinberg, 2000). Ed.D students are provoked by how teachers have been silenced and how curricular policies and practices assume a disembodied operating mode. Individual and collective voice is amplified across Ed.D. cohort students, gaining momentum as our CPED program pulls in the opposite direction.

Coursework deliberately fostering possibilities for seeing, analyzing, and acting on the particular complexities of classrooms illuminates the potentiality of self and other(s) within curricular situations. The empowerment of educators encountering, negotiating, and articulating the complexities of classrooms alongside other educators is concretely experienced as practitioner knowledge is developed, nurtured, and recognized/celebrated among fellow educators. We find that it is within these programmatic spaces for questioning, resisting, adapting, and changing, that concrete practice enables educators to gain language to confidently speak, advocating for learners and learning in their own settings, communities, and beyond.

Cultivating Educators' Sensibilities

Increasingly obvious to CPED faculty and cohort students is that curricular enactment within all educative settings becomes mere rote activity without intentionality and ongoing critical reflection on one's practices. As Freire insisted (Horton & Freire, 1990), theory and practice ought not be separated. The theorizing voices cultivated across CPED cohort students begins with what they know about their own students, subject matter, and contexts. It is the intersections of students, subject matter, and contexts that forms and informs educators' curricular enactment. Investing in educators' sensibilities to see and act accordingly, characterizes research as a habit for all educators, not a special province to be divorced from practice or practitioners. As such, research is not reduced to a particular method, nor focused on technical procedures, nor conducted by a few for consumption by many. Rather, research is local, attentive to context with method determined through the particularities of research questions and settings, and doubly intended to flesh out theory and refine practice.

The sensibilities needed for embracing the search within research are grounded in perception. Dewey's (1934) distinction between seeing and recognition reveals the active and receptive nature of the search that perceiving entails, rather than the labeling and categorization at which recognition tends to stop. The active nature of perceiving is intentionally fostered in CPED students as they identify problems of practice derived from their own educative situations. These problems of practice, which are constantly honed and refined, then become entries into continued inquiry. Encouraged to see their problems of practice from multiple perspectives, unpacking the complexities encountered over and over again, these problems morph into searches for ways that honor and build upon the complexities of educational settings, rather than ignoring them. Cultivating this multisensory awareness takes much time and persistence. Ed.D. students find themselves moving away from the temptations of recognition strategies (that claim to eliminate or fix problems, but rarely do) towards attending to the contributing relations undergirding these problems as resources for inquiry not seen before (Heaton & Swidler, 2012). The following example (written with overt tribute to Dewey's [1929] pedagogical creed) illuminates the growing awareness by our Ed.D students. It was written as part of a comprehensive exam response after five semesters in the program:

Education is dynamic, diverse, personal and communal, and like life, does not have to be lived one way in order to bear fruit. Too often we pay lip service to the idea of education as living, our school's mission statements profess to be "preparing life-long learners." But in claiming to "prepare" life-long learners, we deny the reality that students are already such learners...Education is not preparation,

it is not training, it is the cultivation of what already is, it is the tending of a life that is already becoming...In the increasingly standardized, top-down, policy driven world of public education today, I feel that we are losing the sense of education as living. Orienting education towards predetermined and defined goals and already imagined future lives is dangerous; a focus on the products of education rather than its processes makes us myopic – we focus only what is measurable, what is easily perceived as an outcome. Even the word ‘outcome’ suggests a finality, the end of a process, something which is whole, whose parts can be seen. In many cases, the fruits of education are not ripe at the end of a lesson, a school year or upon graduation. An obsession with products leads us to restrict our processes, the multiple ways that education can be carried out, ways that it can be lived, experienced and shared. The process of education, like life itself, and the individual lives of the teachers and students who take part in it, they are not one thing, they are not done one way, and they do not produce one result...

Examples like this reveal how the active nature of perceiving entails CPED students’ commitments to their students’ learning experiences, following the unfolding relational complexities as productive for all involved. But, the receptive nature of perceiving is also confronted as the attention required of educators to follow these ensuing interactions insists upon a willingness to fully attend with an openness to hear, see, and feel in ways that allow for connections to form that illuminate the problems of practice.

As we document the development of our Ed.D. students’ problems of practice, it seems that involving educators in practicing the needed receptivity creates room to precipitate suggestions. These receptive modes invite educators to make room for deliberation. Flexibility and patience are called upon here, as educators reconsider their aims and habits, sometimes painfully. Intuition also finds room to be negotiated. Educators reveal previous experiences and reexamine the patterns, structures, and conditions of those experiences. Those then become the genesis of new pursuits. Room for anticipation is also found. Educators’ problems of practice involve them in a search for continuity as the recursive cycles entailed in the refinement and addressing of their problems of practice continually anticipate possible connections en route. This anticipatory ground makes room for new ideas interdependent with willingness to navigate conflict, discomforts, and uncertainty, alongside the creative and invigorating energy of new terrain. Enlarged realizations are instilled, suggested through these receptive modes of deliberation, intuition, anticipation, and the emergence of new ideas.

The problems of practice revisited throughout the program of study offer productive pauses, allowing room to form suggestions and to act on them. It is this active and receptive process of inquiry that expands the range of fruitful possibilities for future action and future decisions that the problems of practice increasingly embrace. The primary avenue that avails, positions educators with the sensitivities to approach problems of practice not as matters to eliminate, but as forming the matters integral to the ongoing search for better learning and teaching and the associated beliefs and habits that accompany these defining tasks within a culture of learning.

Cultivating Educators' Capacities

Problems of practice for our Ed.D. students are not resolved so much as refined or transformed into new conditions that implicate new problems. This does not imply that attention to problems of practice does not position practitioners to be more efficacious with their practice. Rather, from the habit of inquiry that is part and parcel of attending to a problem of practice, each step forward sheds new insights into the possibilities and problems not seen before. The Ed.D. students are positioned to seize the opportunities and challenges of continually reformulating their problems of practice as all coursework embeds practices that productively complicate students' theory/practice relations. Thus, throughout the program as a whole, Ed.D. students are asked to examine education, not only as it exists, but also as a phenomenon involving deeply ethical responsibilities and judgments that underlie educational theories and practices as manifested in classrooms, research, and policy. In our CPED program, education as concerned with ethical spaces becomes difficult to dismiss, as coursework continually opens into ethical considerations at play through embracing the given multiplicities all participants bring to bear. Drawing across grade levels, disciplines, and settings, the conversations generated through coursework position all involved to learn with and through others. Thus, the roles of differences as catalysts in coming to know self and other(s) become empowering capacities that shape the evolution of our Ed.D. practitioners.

Programmatic practices emulate the enactive nature of practitioner knowledge that invests in the formative nature of professional knowledge. In turn, our Ed.D. graduates invest in the formative nature of learning, enacted within their own educative settings. As Chan (2012), one of our CPED faculty colleagues has explained, throughout the program our students find themselves "shifting [their] sense of professional identity" (p. 185) both as teachers and as researchers. Negotiating this dual identity is often difficult (Wilhelm, 2008), always complex, and likely ultimately enriching for the graduate, for his/her students, and for the profession. The Ed.D. positions all involved

to reconsider and renegotiate their teaching identities, creating the necessary spaces where educators' practices can be developed and nurtured, problems of practice can be enacted as ongoing challenges and opportunities, and greater agency for teachers can be claimed, thereby furthering student learning.

As our Ed.D students graduate, we take pride in the professional practitioners we see reinvesting and revitalizing educative practices as they assume new and enhanced roles within their communities because of capacities gained related to our program outcomes. A student nearing graduation explains:

The classes I took as a CPED cohort member have helped me immeasurably in my role as an educational practitioner. Now, I'm able to speak with confidence about the issues facing teachers and advocate for practices I believe beneficial to teaching. My beliefs are backed by the research we read, discussed, and wrote about in our CPED classes. As a doctoral candidate, I know I will continue to keep up with current research long after I complete my dissertation.

In brief, we see their successful contestation of the paradigmatic understandings that worried Au (2010). It is the concrete practice with capacities gained through confronting, articulating, enacting, and celebrating practitioner knowledge in our Ed.D. program that creates a community of learning professionals invested in enlarging understandings of education that will extend beyond local communities over time. Our Ed.D. graduates express well-honed strengths of conviction regarding their personal teaching identities and educators' agentive importance within learning contexts that suggest long-term professional connections. It is the fruits of these capacities that we see as very much sustaining and nurturing educators' professional knowledge over the long term.

From Inchoate Restlessness to Practitioner Leader

The patterns cultivating practitioner voice, sensibilities, and capacities as reflected within the experiential in situ data suggest that our CPED program has been understood by participants (students and faculty) as a refuge of sorts, a space where "practitioner knowledge counts." In that sense—participants think it is what it purports to be—a program different from and counter to some other currents that attempt to reductively define and impose external characterizations of practitioner knowledge. It is a co-created space offering sustenance practitioners are seeking, and in doing so, it models professional development that cultivates individual/collective practitioner knowledge always in the making.

As a multi-university initiative that attempts to redefine graduate teacher education by changing both the internal purposes of university Ed.D. preparation and the external way the Ed.D. is understood (as a degree indicating expertise in practice), CPED is an important initiative, directly involving dozens of institutions of higher education with implications for many more (Macintyre Latta & Wunder, 2012). An account of our promising (so far) implementation at our campus should be relevant elsewhere as it illustrates a viable way to cultivate practitioner knowledge with important implications for embedded professional development. It also serves as a reminder to the field writ large that local, context-responsive actions by reflective, skilled practitioners are key ways that educational knowledge manifests itself as inquiry that values and invests in teachers' voices, sensibilities, and capacities.

We see much evidence that professional development characterized as cultivating educators' voices, sensibilities, and capacities to invest in learners and learning, grounded within the particularities of their own educative contexts, incites professional agency. Groundwater-Smith and Campbell (2010) point out that such agency rests in part "upon the nature of the relationship between teachers as practitioner researchers and those who may support them" (p. 201). It is the nature of this relationship between participating educators as practitioner researchers and participating faculty that the CPED program foregrounds, positioning all involved to negotiate this relationship in an ongoing, respectful manner. The manifesting relationships invest in professional knowledge that is socially constructed through the purposeful interchange of multi-perspectival theories with concrete educative practices and policies. As faculty, our professional knowledge has enlarged and deepened alongside our CPED students' professional knowledge. We bring knowledge to the table, but that knowledge is enhanced, challenged, and deepened as we reference it dialogically with the CPED students. It needs to not only make sense in the abstract, but also to be relevant to the restless purposefulness that these expert practitioners operating in particular contexts are endeavoring to hone.

Formative professional knowledge is increasingly documented worldwide as holding the needed agency for educative practices and policies to productively connect inquiry with professional learning in education (Groundwater-Smith & Campbell, 2010). The productivity our CPED program chronicles is conveyed through educators' growing voices, sensibilities, and capacities to articulate, see, and act to further learning, given the complexities and diversities encountered in varied educative settings. It is the relational investment in practitioner knowledge that does not separate practitioners from researchers that we see as foundational to the professional development that enables CPED students and faculty to advocate for educative practices that build and

sustain learning contexts that position all involved as inquirers. Or, in the words of a CPED student:

[I]n claiming to 'prepare' life-long learners, we deny the reality that students are already such learners, we pretend that the joy of learning is in the future, we prepare them to exercise this learning later... Because you'll need to know it when you grow up, get to junior high, go to college, etc. is a common and unfortunate rationale for much of the education we provide in public schools...

Our CPED program embodies the needed professional agency to inquire, providing much-needed sustenance for professional learning that we experience to be empowering for all involved. It offers a pathway to address the too common denial of teacher voice, sensibilities, and capacities within educative practices and policies that typify much of what constitutes professional development for educators worldwide. And, it is a pathway that we now see our Ed.D. graduates extending further as they assume leadership roles in their educative settings, continuing to invest in the development of their own practitioner knowledge while creating the circumstances to invest in the development of their colleagues' professional knowledge. The possibilities impacting all stakeholders—from learners to teachers to administrators to policy makers to parents—hold the potentials that invigorate continued investment in our Ed.D. Program.

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Capturing the Processes of Our Transformative Learning in a Transdisciplinary Research Course

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ABSTRACT

Transdisciplinary scholarship has experienced a renaissance in higher education. Yet, little research has captured transformations in students' viewpoints as they collaborate in transdisciplinary courses to consider solutions to complex societal problems. In this narrative inquiry, I chronicled my doctoral students' perspectives and my thinking in a Transdisciplinary Research class in which students attempted to unravel the social justice dilemma of escalating economic disparities between rich and poor citizens in the United States. I believe knowledge is socially constructed. Therefore, student collaboration and sharing of their reflective stances were integral to the curriculum.

“Although the notion of transformative learning points to a desirable destination for educational endeavors, the difficulty in the journey is often neglected”
(Mälkki & Green, 2014, p. 5)

Nearly 40 percent of university faculty recently reported they have taught a course in which students contemplate why and how to span discipline boundaries to solve multifaceted societal and scientific issues in transdisciplinary courses (Gray, 2008). However, participants' experiences in transdisciplinary courses remain unknown despite insights that might emerge from detailed explorations of transdisciplinary educational arenas (Derry, 2005). In this narrative inquiry, I captured my doctoral students' learning processes in a transdisciplinary research class in which I followed dimensions of transformative learning tenets. I also documented transformative changes in students' frames of reference, and highlighted my shortcomings as a transformative learning educator.

A Brief Review of Transdisciplinary Research

Transdisciplinary inquiries integrate and synthesize content, theory, and methodology from diverse areas of study that will answer designated research questions framed according “to life-world problems rather than disciplines” (Kueffer, Hirsch Hadorn, Bammer, van Kerkhoff, & Pohl, 2007, p. 22). Moreover, scholars from relevant fields share resources and engage equitably in research with knowledgeable practitioners and stakeholders to achieve a common goal (Hirsch Hadorn et al., 2008). For example, a transdisciplinary sociologist interested in discerning the effects of poverty on impoverished community members would not engage in a study by herself. Rather, she would invite community residents (i.e., stakeholders) as well as scholars and practitioners in germane disciplines to share their insights and help shape the research agenda.¹

My Pedagogical Orientation

Some research indicates an instructor’s educational philosophy and related teaching approaches may produce more beneficial outcomes for students in transdisciplinary programs of study than course content (Newell, 1994). Therefore, I briefly describe myself and my pedagogical orientation and teaching dispositions relevant to this inquiry.

I am a white, middle-aged, middle-class, female professor at a top-tier, research-one university. I value adult learners’ experiences and talents, and work to position the instructor-student power dynamics so we are all co-learners. I believe knowledge is socially constructed, and active participation is an integral component to students’ attainment of understanding (Wenger, 2006). I am philosophically disposed toward transformative learning theory “as a powerful image for understanding how adults learn” (Dirkx, 1998, p. 1). Thus, I encourage student collaboration, limit lectures, promote a problem-based and cooperative learning environment, and create opportunities for students to become personally involved with their scholarship by taking charge of their learning. I also work to foster a sense of cohesive, democratic solidarity and encourage students to question, become aware and critical of their assumptions, and feel free to take risks and offer their opinions. This style of teaching is often not an easy way to teach. “It means asking yourself, am I willing to transform in the process of helping my students transform?” (Taylor, 2008, p. 13). I learned through this inquiry it also means asking myself,

How can I support and challenge my students as they experience discomfort related to navigating a transformative learning agenda? In what ways can I encourage students to become critical of their assumptions? What might I discover about my pedagogy as a professor who adheres to tenets of transformative learning in a transdisciplinary research course? (from my journal notes)

Confronting My Mistakes

Research suggests working on complex, authentic problems situated beyond the university environment, such as in transdisciplinary courses, may enhance student teaching (Lattuca, Voigt, & Fath, 2004). Therefore, in the spirit of transparency I maintain throughout this inquiry, I must acknowledge that the first time I taught a transdisciplinary research course, I did not sufficiently appreciate the value of authentic problem solving as it pertains to research that crosses discipline boundaries. As a result, I neglected to connect course content to a contemporary societal issue. Consequently, my students had difficulties understanding transdisciplinary theory.

Thus, the second time I taught the course Transdisciplinary Research (described in this paper), I was determined to ensure the curriculum was authentically issue-driven. I sought to include a strong, pragmatic, problem-solving, group effort component to our work that would supply a foundation for our reflexive thinking and meaning making. I envisioned students would collaborate to identify a social problem and then work to solve it. Yet, before meeting my students, I became concerned about their capabilities to choose a worthwhile problem to study without my substantial input and guidance. Consequently, I made another error and decided to link chronic disparities in wealth distribution in the United States as a salient foundation for our communal research. In hindsight, following tenets of transdisciplinarity, I should have offered my students the opportunity to choose and own their problem to investigate. A critical defining characteristic of transdisciplinarity is the joint inclusion of stakeholders (in this case, my students) in delineating research objectives and strategies (see King, 2009).

Another concern I did not anticipate was that all 11 students in the class matriculated in related educational disciplines, in contrast to genuine transdisciplinary research that intersects scholars from diverse sources and includes knowledgeable practitioners and stakeholders. We were hampered by our homogeneous educational knowledge base and worldview.

My Reasons for Conducting the Study

As I prepared to teach the course, I turned to the extant literature and discovered there is a need for inquiries that chart transdisciplinary processes from students' first-person points of view in 21st century learning communities (Vess & Linkon, 2002). In particular, research needs to explore the connections among transdisciplinary "theory, pedagogy, course enactment, and student perceptions" (p. 96).

I also wondered how my students might reflect about course content and communicate their developing understandings and quandaries throughout the semester. Additionally, I wanted to add my own ongoing challenges, perceptions, and thinking to the study to inform my professional growth and provide opportunities for me to fine-tune future transdisciplinary course activities. Moreover, as a transformative learning theory proponent, I sought to document in what ways my students might develop the capacity to reflect critically on the lenses they used "to filter, and interpret the world" (Belenky & Stanton, 2000, p. 1). I also wanted to provide insights to faculty who wished to design and offer quality transdisciplinary learning environments.

The Inquiry

At the beginning of the semester, after receiving Institutional Review Board approval, I invited my 11 doctoral students (two men, nine women, all Caucasian) to engage with me in a study about our involvement and experiences in the class as we considered problems and solutions related to poverty in the United States. Ten were from middle-class American environments. Ben² had immigrated on his own to the United States from former communist-dominated Hungary, where he and his family had endured economic hardships and hunger. None of the 11 students had previously considered the social and political factors related to economic inequity in the United States. All of the students decided to participate in the study. I had few reservations about students contributing candid thoughts and opinions.

Literatures Informing the Inquiry

I relied on interconnected literatures that provide perspectives on collegial learning to undergird the inquiry and guide my analytic lens. The theories illustrate how adults construct knowledge as they work jointly in social environments.

The first prototype, Communities of Practice, provides a useful perspective on knowing and learning. Lave and Wenger (1991) define Communities of Practice as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they learn and do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (p. 98). Membership in a Community of Practice implies a combination of three elements: (1) a commitment to a domain, or area of interest (in this case, transdisciplinarity and social justice as it pertains to economic disparity between rich and poor in the United States); (2) a community engaged in actions and discussions pertinent to a domain (i.e., our class); and (3) shared experiences, stories, and ways of figuring out dilemmas and quandaries (Wenger, 1998).

In the second model, Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), learning takes a broad meaning and is viewed as a fundamental dimension of social participation. Situated Learning Theory explains as individuals participate in social practices within a social organization, the organization shapes their understandings. In turn, as individuals gain new understandings, their newly acquired knowledge shapes the thinking and processes of the social organization to which they belong (Bleiler, 2014). Relevant to this study also is that situated learning theory asks in what ways learning facilitators (e.g., me, as the instructor) change as they interact with co-learners and strive to promote learning.

Furthermore, Distributed Intelligence Theories offer support for this inquiry. Although creative individuals are often thought of as working in isolation, scholars believe much of human intelligence and creativity arises from synergistic interaction and collaboration with individuals from different disciplines and ways of thinking (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

Choosing Narrative

My reasoning for choosing narrative follows. In this inquiry, I assumed three roles: teacher, researcher, and study participant in which I placed myself alongside my students as we journeyed together through the course. Thus, my views and perceptions were part of the data I collected. As Clandinin (2013) comments, narratives make meaning of participants’ stories and those of researchers as well. In addition, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) point out “researchers need to tell their stories too” (p. 12).

I also selected narrative inquiry because of its capacity to preserve participants’ authentic voices and, reveal their thinking, confusions, hopes, relationships, and ways

they interpret the world (Brooks, Arnold, & Brooks, 2013). Without question, the research reported here was dependent on my students' ideas and dilemmas as they pondered, discussed, and applied their developing understanding of transdisciplinary research in an attempt to find solutions to economic inequity among citizens in the United States.

In addition, I turned to narrative because as narrative is broadly defined it, "come[s] in many forms and sizes" (Riessman, 2008, p. 23), and portrays transformations over time (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). When I considered these notions, I realized my students' weekly e-mail reflections and in-class discussions, coupled with my thoughts and journal notes, embodied central dimensions of narrative.

Determining Data to Include in the Study

I must clarify in what ways I selected data (i.e., "field texts") to incorporate in this manuscript (what Clandinin and Huber, 2010, refer to as "research texts"). There is no doubt I was influenced by my biases as the professor of the course, my beliefs about teaching and learning, and my personal and professional experiences. Yet, I was mindful to choose students' e-mail stories, students' in-class dialogue, my thoughts during class, and notes from my journal I believed best portrayed the "truth" of our situated lives. I included data from four of the 11 study participants because their reflections particularly made clear how learning is a developmental process that evolves over time (i.e., temporally).

Selecting an Approach to Analyze the Data

The majority of narrativists believe "narratives do not speak for themselves" (Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p. 264). "People tell stories, but narratives come from the analysis of stories" (Frank, 2000, p. 4). The researcher's role is to interpret the stories to give voice to the storytellers (Frank, 2000). Recognizing there are multiple approaches for analyzing narrative field texts, after considerable reading, I decided to use Mezirow's Ten-Phase *Hierarchical Framework of Change* (2000) to interpret and make sense of the data (refer to the Appendix for a listing of Mezirow's 10-phase framework). Mezirow's paradigm categorizes a process in which individuals encounter a disorienting dilemma that causes them to question their currently held assumptions and, as a result, alter their frames of reference by moving through various stages

of critical reflection (i.e., individuals work through their beliefs and assumptions “and assess their validity in the light of new experiences or knowledge,” Cranton, 2002, p. 65). I particularly chose Mezirow’s model because both critical reflection and social responsibility are paramount to Mezirow’s framework and these constructs were also critical to our meaning making in the course.

Of interest is that the meaning imbedded in my students’ discourse affirmed later conceptions of the process of transformative learning in which scholars concluded “the process does not always follow the exact sequence of phases but generally includes some variations of the identified phases” (Taylor, 2000, p. 290). Specifically, my students moved through earlier stages of transformation in a linear, but not step-by-step fashion as they tried to make their own interpretations and meaning. Only one student (Meg, who is highlighted in the next section of this paper) regressed to an earlier phase of the transformative process.

Making the Data Visible

From My Notes After Class One

As soon as I arrive home from class I receive e-mail reflections from students that indicate, not surprisingly, they are in the first stage of Mezirow’s (2000) phases of Transformative Learning (experiencing a disconcerting dilemma). It is usually in confronting unknown ideas that one’s previously held worldview becomes a disorienting problem. Prior to reading the syllabus, my students had not heard the term transdisciplinary and equated it with multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary teaching. They also were unsure about social justice in terms of wealth distribution, opportunities, and privileges within a society. Furthermore, they didn’t question why we were going to study economic inequities in the United States. I know they are anxious about the course, which makes me anxious as well. In fact, anxiety among faculty who support students in transformative learning courses is well known (Mälkki & Green, 2014). One reason is that facilitating and supporting the transformations of insecure students who feel challenged and out of their comfort zone is demanding. Students’ prior beliefs are tested as they struggle to adopt new perspectives. But, “an educator who is afraid of the dissolution of [students’] established beliefs will find it difficult to accompany students on their journey” (p. 10). Therefore, I cannot be afraid. I can’t allow myself to get alarmed about my students’ apprehensions. I know their established understandings about

single-person research have already started to dissolve and I have to accompany and support them on this journey of creating new possibilities and meaning. I can't help myself though—I worry as I read the following e-mail reflections. Will this semester work out?

A Student's E-mail Reflections After Class One

As I expected, the e-mail reflections from all 11 students indicated they were in Phase 1, Experiencing a Disconcerting Dilemma as delineated by Mezirow (2000). The following messages illuminate some students' confusions.

Diana (an elementary teacher). Her message permeates with vulnerability and uncertainty. I felt a bit lost during and after our class. As to having a clear definition for what transdisciplinary research is...well I don't exactly have one yet. What I do know is it seems similar to multimodal and multidisciplinary teaching. Is it? Maybe it isn't? It seems to be a ripe field for philosophical and collaboration and that in order to be transdisciplinary it should address a problem.

Beth (a verbal, secondary English teacher). Beth, too, admits her confusion. But it is interesting to note she accepts responsibility for learning.

Can you use the term, "transdisciplinary experiences"? Have I used it within the correct context? Just writing my thoughts about class tonight forces me to realize how much I need to learn in order to be write about transdisciplinary in a cognizant manner. I need to read a lot and reflect.

From my notes. Beth's reflection (see above) makes me think about the connection between shifts in perspective and the necessary simultaneous extension of students' language. Discourse expands language and fosters new thinking that can be "reflected upon, and communicated" (Meyer & Land, 2005, p. 374). In other words, you can't think about something or share your thinking with others unless you have the language to think about it. Therefore, it's clear that discussion is paramount to my students' acquisition of new vocabulary and ideas about economic inequity in the United States.

From My Notes After Class Two

My students' questions tonight about transdisciplinary research show me they have a long way to go to understand what this class is about. I might be (no, I am)

pushing them too much to take it all in and then engage in transdisciplinary research to figure out solutions to economic inequity in the United States. Perhaps I should slow down. After all, this is only the beginning of the course. Tonight I also made another mistake—after providing demographic information about 45.3 million Americans living in poverty (United States Census Bureau, 2013), I posed a problem that focused on a community of people in low-income housing near the university: “How might we as citizens provide help to the citizens living in Hayes Village?” (a pseudonym). That’s where we quickly learned you cannot solve a transdisciplinary research problem unless you know what stakeholders consider problematic. So, we learned something. But we were also stuck because, as a group of transdisciplinary-research researchers, we needed to know where to discover information that would lead us to possible solutions to the problem and we did not have any reference materials at hand except the Internet—no stakeholders—historical artifacts, readings, multi-discipline experiences, nothing. That’s my fault. And students are understandably uneasy with the unknown. Here’s another concern. I now (just now!) realize engaging in transdisciplinary research to try to find solutions to wealth disparity in the United States might be way too big a problem for us to handle in 15 weeks. We are not economics and political experts. To engage in authentic transdisciplinary research it seems we need to have scholars in other disciplines in our class. I just located a great CNN report (Sutter, 2013) on how to lower the rich-poor gap. This should prove helpful.

Ben in class three (a former citizen of Soviet-dominated Hungary, a free spirit, a community gardener, highly artistic). Stage five. A call for action. “Why do we sit talking about transdisciplinary research? Why are we not helping humanity? We could start a rooftop garden on top of the Education Building and give the vegetables to people who are hungry.”

From My Notes After Class Three

After our third class students began to reflect somewhat. I feel good about this. Ben even made a seismic jump to Stage Five (Mezirow, 2000) and calls for action. Ben had a great idea. It makes sense that his prior economic hardships and hunger in communist Hungary might influence his reasoning about giving food to those in poverty situations. To a large extent, all of us are affected by our backgrounds. Much of what we know and believe, “our values and our feelings, depends on the context – biographical, historical, cultural- in which they are embedded” (p. 3). But we need to think things through as transdisciplinary researchers. Shouldn’t we involve the stakeholders from the get-go? What do stakeholders think they need? And is a

rooftop garden feasible? Are we being overly altruistic and also considering “them” and “us”? I think so. Diana also wants to explore options for action.

Diana (e-mail after class 3). Stage five. A call for action. Compared to her initial reflection, Diana’s timidity has decreased. Yet, she still wants to know what I think.

Ben just mentioned something great tonight—a rooftop garden at our College of Education. Why couldn’t we invite some other departments to join us in this project? We could use Ben’s knowledge of organic gardening, someone from the science department, etc. To me, hunger is a major problem and it is unfortunately a problem near our college. What do you think? How might we be a part of this?

From My Notes After Class Six

It seems “Stage Five: A Call for Action” is where all of my students experience their comfort level. Mälkki and Lindblom-Ylänne (2012) explain we all have a natural tendency to remain at our comfort level and resist moving forward to a new level of transformational learning. Learners can get stalled at any phase. “This is especially true at the beginning of a transformation with its threat to long-established sense of order” (Mezirow, 2000, p. xii). Mezirow’s idea helps clarify why my students are at an impasse. They are still in the early stages of the course and they’re not yet ready to cross the threshold and move on to a later stage of transformation because (perhaps) of the conceptual difficulty of trying to understand transdisciplinary and social justice tenets related to poverty at the same time and in one semester. Or (and I need to think about this more), I have not supported them sufficiently. I’m also concerned the topic of economic inequality between rich and poor in the United States is not particularly conducive to transformative learning because we are separated (too far removed) from what are trying to grasp. We need to get out in the community surrounding the university. The literature refers to this impasse—this block to students’ progress as *liminality*—confusion, resisting, disoriented because “leaving the cocoon of one’s founding premises throws one into an existential turmoil” (Mälkki & Green, 2014, p. 18). If the transformative process remains static at some point, which is relevant to this study (i.e., individuals remain in a state of disequilibrium), “it is likely due to the difficulties experienced during a transitional phase when one is in a state between two different meaning frameworks letting go of the prevailing but not yet achieving the potential one” (Meyer, Land, & Baillie, 2010, p. 8; i.e., *liminality*). Emerging from the liminality experience and moving forward in suppositions often takes substantial time for one’s conceptual understanding to catch up to tenuous new premises (Mälkki & Green, 2014).

I need to try to understand what is posing my students' obstacles to transformation. Transformative theorists note the importance of optimum conditions for supporting students' transformative learning. Am I not creating optimum conditions? When Ben asks, "What are our options?" Shouldn't I address his question? Yet, it would do no good for me to lecture and supply my students with a template of what they need to learn. True, a cognitive map security blanket would provide them with a sense of safety, but would not serve to as a substitute for transformation (see Mälkki & Green, 2014). My students need to make their own journey of transformation. I just need to remember as transformative learning scholar, Kathy King, told me (personal communication, 2015) "reframing values and beliefs takes time – much more than a semester."

Meg (in class eight). Stage seven. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan. Meg is a full-time doctoral student who is thoughtful and reflective. She offers some insights about theoretical underpinnings of action.

Why are we sitting here talking instead of going out and doing? I think the question is a good one, and I've spent some time thinking about it today. Transdisciplinarity is abstract. But, focusing solely on the "going out and doing" aspect of transdisciplinarity would, I think, miss an important part of the process, which is a focus on the theoretical underpinnings that move our practice to a very specific type of praxis. What do we need to know?

My thoughts in class. Oh this is good. Meg gets it. She's moved forward in her thinking. Will the other students jump on board? But then I remember something. We still haven't touched on solutions to the economic gaps between rich and poor in the United States. In fact, we haven't even touched the surface of the rich-poor gap. Except for Meg, students are still stuck in their preoccupation with a call for action. It is my error.

From My Notes After Class Nine

Today I experienced an unexpected, shocking episode of transformative learning. Different from a stepwise, gradual progression of transformation, Mezirow (2000) refers to this intense insight I experienced as *epochal* (i.e., *significant, powerful, and sudden*). Specifically, my subconsciously and unexamined views about people in poverty in the United States were challenged. I just read a book titled *Reaching and Teaching Students in Poverty: Strategies for Erasing the Opportunity Gap* authored by Paul Gorski (2013) who teaches at George Mason University. Here's what struck

me. Are we trying to “fix” people of poverty by “helping” them? By considering what we want to give to people who we consider as disadvantaged don’t we actually hurt them? Do we have a “Savior Syndrome”? These ideas are now in the forefront of my thinking. Aren’t we taking a deficit view of people who live in poverty? By that I mean we do not need to “fix” people in poverty circumstances. We need to alter social and political conditions to enable people from low socioeconomic circumstances to empower themselves. They need better access to education, health care, and jobs. Why couldn’t I have consciously understood this early on so I could bring these ideas to my students??? I could have at least shared my views. I should have read this book prior to teaching the class. Now I understand what Taylor (2008) means when he presents this statement to transformative learning facilitators: “It means asking yourself, am I willing to transform in the process of helping my students transform?” (p. 13). I am embarrassed to say I should have known better. My efforts need to include helping students acquire the skills necessary for understanding the literature about poverty. *It seems as I teach this course I am learning to teach this course.*

From My Notes After Class 10

I brought Paul Gorski’s (2013) ideas to the class tonight. Students were at a cognitive/emotional place where they could understand and begin to internalize these concepts. So—all is not lost—except now I feel distraught—Students’ continued resistance, to explore more valid assumptions beyond a “Call to Action” were more than partially caused by me (another mistake). Reviewing my notes shows we did not do a sufficient amount of research needed this semester to move forward beyond a stereotypical deficit view of people in poverty. For example, I think we all needed to read and discuss a chapter I just found: *Social justice and the fifth force: Theories and concepts* (Chung & Bemak, 2011).

From My Notes After Classes 11-13

Nothing new has happened with students’ shifts forward. We have great conversations, the discourse is always interesting, and students continue to question, ponder, and actively discuss, but they haven’t reached any new milestones. It is clear I have not set up a process in which learners become more aware of the underlying causes of their beliefs. They have not experienced a change in perspectives. I know this now. I need to question my students and assign readings to challenge their assumptions. I am teaching this course again for the third time in the fall. I will do better.

From My Notes After Class 14

It's the end of the semester and students [*see reflections below*] are doing a great job of summarizing their thinking. They have not yet experienced deep, structural shifts in their beliefs about how to alleviate economic inequality in the United States. They have not yet seriously considered the relationship of power associated with race, class, gender, and socioeconomic status. And, except for Meg they have not moved beyond Stage Five 5 as delineated on Mezirow's (2000) framework. However, without my prompting, they have begun to take stock of their learning in the course. They appear to be summing up what they have learned not only for me and for other students in our class, but also for themselves.

Diana (e-mail reflection). Diana's reflection shows she has learned a lot about transdisciplinary research. She astutely says this type of research is influenced by individuals' abilities to solve problems. She still questions herself: "Am I doing this right?"

The first few weeks of class I was confusing interdisciplinary with what I now know as transdisciplinary. I am very much interested in the notion of transdisciplinary research. To me, it just makes sense you would want to have multiple fields involved in an effort to "solve various problems." Having those multiple fields/disciplines would allow the team a well-rounded way of thinking about a solution. It seems many of the efforts that have been made to address issues in for example, education, have been short-[sighted] and quick fixes.... I wonder if it is because the scope of knowledge is limited based on the individual's abilities to "solve various problems". I'm not sure if that makes any sense. I'm just going with what I'm thinking. Does any of that make sense? Am I doing this right?

From my notes. Oh-oh. Meg's closing reflection (see below) indicates despite her earlier move forward in her suppositions (see Meg's reflection for class eight and compare it with her reflection below), she is stuck in the threshold of liminality. She also critically questions the validity of solving social justice issues.

Meg (e-mail reflection). Meg continues to think about the importance of stakeholders in transdisciplinary research. She also reveals she has reverted back to a "we-them" view.

I continue to make personal connections with transdisciplinarity. I ponder ways in which researchers and members of diverse communities could potentially merge their various understandings of the world in order to transform understanding of complex problems. As transdisciplinary researchers, before we attempt to find

solutions to a problem our guiding questions might be: What are the needs for change? What are stakeholders' beliefs and perceptions about the need for change and *what might we do to help them move forward?* Is the need for change in this particular case doable? But, Dr. R., I wonder if we can really 'solve' issues of social justice. Are we naive to think we can, or can't?

Beth (e-mail reflection). Beth's summary shows she continues to focus on two basic, uncomplicated, straightforward ideas we discussed at the beginning of the semester: (a) Do not assume to know what people in poverty need; and (b) As transdisciplinary, we need to remember to learn from scholars in other pertinent disciplines.

As we move into the final weeks of our class I find myself reflecting on what I will transfer to my professional practice. While I don't anticipate finding myself on a panel of transdisciplinary researchers in the near future, the schema and experiences I developed this semester will provide a holistic perspective of social justice issues. My big take away is we can't assume to know what a population needs. We must endeavor to learn their perspective in order to adequately address issues of social justice. Additionally, we must be willing to adapt our perspective based upon what we have learned from researchers in other disciplines.

From My Notes After Our Last Class

The semester is over and it's time to make sense of what I learned through this inquiry. If we want to know ourselves and gain insight into the meaning of our experiences, then "we must come to know our own story" (McAdams, 1993, p. 1). Thus, I share the Limitations of the Inquiry below followed by the meaning I gleaned from the research.

Limitations

There are several limitations of the inquiry I must address prior to sharing the closing segment of our "story." An important consideration is that researcher subjectivity is a central component of the qualitative research process. What I saw in the data was influenced by my life experiences; my role as an involved, committed instructor of a transdisciplinary research course; who I am as a transformative learning educator; and my subconsciously held personal and professional biases. Feminist perspectives also acknowledge the transactional nature of qualitative work and the challenges,

limitations, and presumption of interpreting others' points of view and realities mediated by one's personal experiences and perceptions (Bahar, 1993; Florio-Ruane, 2001). Moreover, hermeneutic considerations "indicate that the same text can be read [and interpreted] in a number of different ways" (Tappan & Brown, 1992, p. 186). Others might draw conclusions different from mine.

Another issue pertains to my students' willingness and abilities to disclose their "truths" through e-mail and in-class conversations. Since I was their instructor who awarded final grades, they may have cautiously monitored what they chose to share with me. A possibility also exists that some students might have had difficulty communicating their thoughts through e-mail or in-class discussions. Therefore, they may not have fully expressed their opinions and questions.

Making Meaning

Writing the finale of our "story" crystallized my convictions that narrative—a methodological approach not used previously in either transdisciplinary or transformative learning research—enabled me to document our experiences and illuminate our concerns and struggles throughout the semester. Our e-mail reflections, thoughts, and comments revealed our worries and confusions and our optimism and uncertainties—the "truths" of our situated lives. Narrative viewed as collaboration between researcher and study participants also permitted me to be "present" with my students (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Noddings, 1984). That is, narrative inquiry created a platform that permitted our voices and vulnerabilities to be heard as we (students and teacher) endeavored to make our understandings clearer.

Another consideration is there is no doubt the research has practical utility. The inquiry informs those who teach transdisciplinary research courses, in which students contemplate why and how to span discipline boundaries, to solve multifaceted societal and scientific issues. The study also sheds light on students' thinking in a doctoral class in which transformative learning philosophy guided instruction. In addition, the data show it is possible for those in transformative learning environments to talk and write about their developmental journeys, including their confusions, skepticisms, and assumptions. Therefore, the inquiry adds to our understanding of the complex nature of learning and the crucial connection between critical reflections and transformations in students' meaning perspectives. This is no small feat. As Harbecke (2012) notes, "Even for educators, who understand that transformation is a profound force in learning,

trying to introduce it in an actual learning experience is like trying to capture lightning in a bottle" (Para. 2).

An additional benefit is that the study highlighted transformation as both a personal and collaborative journey that begins with a disorienting dilemma, consists of starts, stops, twists, turns, anxiety, and confusions and is influenced by one's affective dimensions and "meaning perspectives acquired passively during childhood and youth" (Cooper, n.d., Para. 5). Therefore, this work offers further validation of Mezirow's (2000) theory of learning as transformation.

Certainly, the research helped me examine, reexamine, contemplate, and address my shortcomings as a transformative learning educator. I was not surprised the inquiry uncovered my inadequacies as an instructor with a transformative teaching and learning philosophy. But I was taken aback when I encountered the extent of my pedagogical flaws, which I shared earlier. Making sense of one's teaching practices is often not easy, especially through a public forum. Yet, acknowledging my pedagogical ineptitude helped me see my teaching in new ways and I conclude I have a lot to achieve the next time I teach Transdisciplinary Research. As the noted French philosopher Paul-Michel Foucault observed, the importance of truth telling in public to serve the common good (i.e., *parrhesia*) is central, not only to educational improvement, but also crucial to the care of the self (Peters, 2003).

A final and most important discovery of this study is that I learned how valiant, indomitable, and willing, my doctoral students were to continue to struggle through the transformative process as they endeavored to articulate their emerging understandings about transdisciplinary research. Some learning theorists believe students in transformative learning classes may simply "give instructors what they want. That is, students only appear to engage with new ideas" (Taylor, 2000, p. 159). But I am confident my students wrote and told their "truths." Although they were unable to overcome their liminality (i.e., they remained in a state of disequilibrium until the end of the course), they never gave up their quest to explore alternative frameworks about transdisciplinary research despite experiencing cognitive dissonance. I am grateful they allowed me into their lived experiences.

Notes

1. For additional information about transdisciplinary research, refer to Derry & Fisher, 2005, and Hoffmann-Riem et al., 2008.
2. All doctoral student names are pseudonyms.

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APPENDIX

Mezirow's Ten Phases of Transformative Learning (2000)

- Phase 1. A disorienting dilemma
- Phase 2. A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
- Phase 3. A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
- Phase 4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
- Phase 5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
- Phase 6. Planning of a course of action
- Phase 7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
- Phase 8. Provisional trying of new roles
- Phase 9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
- Phase 10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective



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Professional Development That Positions Teachers as Inquirers and Possibilizers

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ABSTRACT

What might braiding social justice orientations to teaching, learning, and educational change with collaborative inquiry-based professional development afford teachers, their students, and our communities? This article unpacks two professional development initiatives to articulate how inquiry co-constructed by and with teachers can take up diversity as generative. The Aboriginal Early Literacy and Curriculum for All projects involved iterative and critical examinations of practice and opportunities for educators to collaboratively consider and create practices that address contextual and social factors. Educators worked together to situate emerging knowledge and beliefs while also challenging the sources and consequences of assumptions.

In this piece we recast professional development as a practice of inquiry co-constructed by and with teachers that includes an ongoing, iterative, and critical examination of practice and the opportunity to collaboratively consider and address contextual, social, and discursive factors (Ball, 2009; Moll, 2014). Through collaborative inquiry, educators can work together to situate emerging knowledge and beliefs while also challenging the sources and consequences of assumptions. Here we offer two examples of collaborative inquiry communities to illustrate the co-creation of interactional spaces where over time multi-voiced contributions of insight, knowledge, pedagogy, and generativity refreshed educators' theories of action. Agency within such an endeavor not only includes the purposeful transformation of classroom practice, but also an opportunity to change discourse itself.

Theoretical Framework

As with both theory and practice, much of the basis for collaborative inquiry-based learning draws on the work of Dewey (1938a, 1938b). Dewey felt that rich learning opportunities could be achieved from the integration of an individual's interests with those of society. Dewey theorized how the social nature of inquiry can enrich ways that we understand knowledge construction by suggesting that knowledge is shaped through the active engagement of diverse perspectives within a community (Bishop et al., 2004; Cranton, 1996).

Werstch (2010) writes of cultural tools, framed by Vygotsky's (1978) conception of socio-cultural tools and thought methodologies, as introducing historical and political dimensions that shape cognition and ultimately mediate discursive practices. Vygotsky (1987) believed language serves communication by supporting humans to coordinate their actions with others through the creation of meaning mediated through social relationships; Moll (2014) extends this work to include professional learning partnerships or groups. Embedded in sociocultural activities are invisible mediations deployed through language use which help humans internalize the social world they experience as well as shape particular dispositions, habits of mind, attention, interests, and motivation. Learning is always a cultural and relational process as we learn through the mediation of others whether it be through direct social interactions, cultural artifacts, or the appropriation of language in both formal or informal settings (Moll, 2014; Wells, 2007). Collaborative inquiry as an approach to professional development holds great promise in terms of attending to teachers', schools', and communities' social worlds and their intersections.

In our work we take up community-based approaches to counter simplistic notions of inquiry that fail to capture many of the factors at play. Community-based inquiry emerges as a broad paradigm-crossing conceptual frame for communities of researchers and professionals. Community, first and foremost, acknowledges the importance of context, extending beyond geography to include social perspectives. In a community approach to inquiry learning, a community forms or members of a community gather to address their aspirations, capabilities, and challenges (Schnellert & Butler, 2014).

Inquiry communities of educators can work together within interactional spaces to develop contextually based discourse practices that enable the co-creation of thought and the development of a common theoretical vocabulary. Greeno (2012) defines this new discourse as a "functional concept" or a cognitive entity that has meaning in a

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particular kind of activity which contributes to the ways participants organize their understandings of their practices. These functional concepts are represented and enacted through new theoretical shared vocabulary which are internalized leading to *action challenges and transformation of practices* (Bazerman, 2012). Moll (2014) suggests that teachers, more than anyone else, must engage in action challenges as a daily component of their practice:

Creating spaces for discussion is a central aspect of teachers' intellectual development as professionals, which includes their acquisition of functional concepts. [T]eachers change themselves in the process of helping to mobilize funds of knowledge for teaching and learning and working with others to help change classrooms for the better. (151–154)

In this way, inquiry communities work as a mediating structure allowing teachers to develop intersubjective ways of knowing and transacting while adding to their funds of pedagogy.

A teaching community can consider qualities and factors that are unique to the group and issues within their local setting (Dillon, O'Brien, & Heilman, 2000; Schnellert & Butler, 2014). By acknowledging the various aspects and challenges the context brings to learning, a situated group inquiry process begins. This work is rooted in a social framework of inquiry which views knowledge as constructed through both experience and dialogue. The group of inquirers is motivated by a position or an issue and is often ethically and philosophically driven to find an answer (Schnellert & Butler, 2014). Inquiry community approaches to professional development are widely seen as having the potential for significant impact in classrooms and super-structures such as policy:

teachers who are members of professional networks or learning communities may find themselves more apt to venture into the unknown, to engage in long-term inquiry, and/or to share what they are learning with others than those who are unsupported by their colleagues. (Van Horn, 2006, p. 61)

While the premise of this approach is that teachers generate local knowledge of and for teaching, determining the sources and consequences of assumptions must also play a role. Efforts to examine how to increase student success and make schools and classrooms more democratic are more likely to be sustained when teachers with personalized questions and diverse perspectives participate together in a community of inquiry.

If meaning is inseparable from and contingent upon context (i.e., a situated perspective), the design of a community's inquiry might change over time to be responsive to the unique factors of the research/learning situation, especially as members discover and challenge previously held assumptions (Schnellert, Richardson, & Cherkowski, 2014). In the case of inquiry communities, the purposeful application of social learning theory gathers momentum when teachers collaboratively study the influences behind their questions and contexts and identify related or absent discourses.

Professional Inquiry Communities as Mediating Structures for Socially Just Pedagogies

In this article we offer two examples of inquiry communities where educators examined their practice, drew on theoretical concepts that are inclusion- and social justice-oriented, and generated new knowledge through seeking and celebrating the funds of knowledge of diverse learners, community members, themselves, and one another as pedagogical resources. These narratives of professional development within inquiry communities occurred in two different school districts, yet there were common qualities that offered rich analysis opportunities. At their core, each initiative allowed participants to grow in safe spaces where risk taking was encouraged in an effort to foster new discursive practices.

Each of these inquiry communities occurred within school districts as part of their ongoing professional learning programs and plans. One contribution of this research is that researchers (the authors here) participated as facilitators and resources to the inquiry communities (Butler & Schnellert, 2012). Participants did not have to take part in the research, rather after the initiatives ended, they were invited to share their learning. Thus, we attended to more naturalistic, organic accounts rather than examining projects that were bounded by university researcher-dominated designs. We participated as inquiry partners facilitating these situated, ongoing, co-constructed communities. Ethics approval was obtained at our institutions and members of the inquiry communities were invited to participate in the research by reflecting on inquiry cycles that took place over the previous school year. In this way they participated in the research knowing what was to be discussed, what had transpired, and with full ownership and agency regarding their learning and experience. Ball (2009) suggests that through lived collaborative experiences, thinking is mediated in powerful ways. We attended to participants' narratives of experience within their respective inquiry

communities—considering the structure of the projects, what educators did, and what they learned.

Multiple forms of data created as part of the inquiry communities were analyzed retrospectively. Data included interviews, reflective writing, artifacts created within the project such as classroom resources, and email communications.

Design of Learning Communities

Several qualities are common across these and other inquiry communities we have worked with (e.g., Butler & Schnellert, 2012; Butler, Schnellert & MacNeil, 2015; Schnellert & Butler, 2014). Each of the inquiry communities involved teacher collaboration and iterative inquiry, were situated in a specific geographic and cultural context, and participants were acknowledged for and invited to share their knowledge and expertise. The two projects we discuss here include a school district initiative to support classroom teachers and First Nations advocates to collaborate to integrate Indigenous knowledges into curriculum and teams of classroom teachers and learning assistance teachers collaborating to disrupt deficit orientations to students with developmental disabilities as they worked together to design curriculum using principles from universal design for learning. In each case the inquiry group was a mediating structure for transforming practice and understandings. Both groups met multiple times during the school year. Each of these learning communities positioned teachers as inquirers and possibilizers. By possibilizers we mean that teachers were welcomed to inquiry communities as active versus passive agents. Participating educators had the discretion to choose and create their own path and practices (Fekadu, 2014).

The Aboriginal Early Literacy Project

A rich Aboriginal student support program has developed in a southern BC school district over the past few years affording students of Aboriginal descent with support in the form of Aboriginal Student Advocates, who from the perspective of a shared cultural heritage, serve as a network among students, their families, and other school personnel. District leaders in Aboriginal Education and Early Literacy came together with questions around how to facilitate opportunities for the Aboriginal Advocates and the teachers of the students they serve to work together in ways that could perhaps transform their roles from sharing a common space to working together within a community of meaningful and collaborative practice. The dual-lens approach of

Aboriginal Education and Early Literacy led to an invitation to grade one teachers and their school-based advocates to join together in an inquiry-based learning community. Twenty-two grade one teachers and 20 Aboriginal advocates representing 18 schools came together on three occasions from February to June to explore the inquiry question: “How can we enhance the learning for all students in grade 1 classrooms through integrating Indigenous knowledge and early literacy practices?”

The new British Columbia draft curriculum (BC Ministry of Education, 2014) and the First Peoples Principles of Learning (FNESC, 2014) were resources for collaborative inquiry while culturally responsive pedagogy served as the theoretical framework (Gay, 2000, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Since part of the strategy in bringing teachers together with the Aboriginal advocates was to realize a more meaningful and effective collaborative partnership around student learning in classrooms, a literacy-focused photo-book project became the vehicle through which this collaboration was realized. Based on the design of an Ontario study (Cleovoulou et al., 2013), the photo-book project became the catalyst to not only bring participants’ respective pedagogical and Indigenous knowledges together, but also to embed developmentally appropriate and inclusive early writing practices in classrooms. The use of students’ own stories from their homes was a strategy in keeping with the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2002; Roswell, 2006).

The first collaborative session was held in a First Nations School Association school where the teachers and advocates experienced traditional teachings from an Elder, songs and drumming from the Band school’s students, traditional food, as well as an opportunity to get to know each other in a context away from their classrooms and schools. The First Peoples Principles of Learning (FNESC, 2014) was a framework through which participants’ co-learning was nurtured. For example, *learning involves patience and time* became an enduring principle that guided: the building of relationships and community; invitations to (re)examine potentialities for Aboriginal advocates to have a more meaningful place in classrooms; and pedagogical knowledge development related to children’s literacy.

The second group inquiry session was held two months later; collaborative partners were able to share their experiences and the progress of their photo-book project with each other. The opportunity to engage in dialogue and integrate their respective experiences led to deeper culturally responsive pedagogical understandings as well as motivation to continue and expand their professional learning. The Medicine Wheel

(Bell, 2014) and the First Peoples Principles of Learning were used as lenses through which the photo-book project was revisited. The iterative nature of returning to the key concepts led to deeper understandings and richer dialogue. One of the most powerful collective learning experiences was the Aboriginal Talking Circles where all perspectives were shared equally among the community of 60 educators (First Nations Pedagogy Online, 2009). The talking circle added to the co-created funds of pedagogy for the teachers and advocates to use with their students.

The third and final session was one of celebration where teachers and advocates were invited to bring samples of their students' photo-books to share gallery-style. The participants decided this meeting should occur at the original Indigenous education site where a collection of students shared their photo-books in authors' circles. Teachers and advocates jointly analyzed their students' writing using a developmental continuum which fostered a rich conversation around how students develop early literacy skills. The final task was to consider how the student photo-books and the entire inquiry experience fueled and enriched curriculum while contributing to teachers' funds of pedagogy which according to Zipin (2009) are the ways of knowing and transacting knowledge related to life experiences of learners. This is echoed in this written reflection from a grade one teacher:

I definitely gained newfound respect for the students and their families! Hearing all of the incredible things they do, know, and discuss as a family was very eye-opening as a new teacher in a lower SES school. It caused me to hold my students in a higher regard and notice how open-ended the curriculum can be if you let the students lead the way! Because I was learning so much from my students, I was eager to share their stories/what I was doing in the classroom with my advocate, colleagues, and parents. With the help of my advocate, I was incorporating a lot more FN vocabulary: "medicine wheel", "regalia," "Okanagan language..." and FN practices: talking circle/ seeking FN speakers to be guests in our classroom. Our advocate would add to our conversations, sharing her knowledge and expertise, and in turn, I would share my literacy knowledge/vocabulary so she could effectively help the students.

Generativity is a term used by Ball (2009) to describe teachers' abilities to add to their understandings by integrating new personal and professional knowledge with existing knowledge while also *reconsidering* existing knowledge in light of the new understandings they are constructing. The teacher's knowledge becomes generative as theories translate into practices with students. The teachers continue learning through and with students within the context of their classrooms where the intersection of theory and practice is realized and their students act as pedagogical resources in the

teaching-learning process (Ball, 2009). Transformational shifts in thinking and acting were shared in participants' reflections:

I feel like this project has provided support to our Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in many ways. First, it has allowed students to better understand and embrace their culture. Students seemed more open and receptive to share stories about their families/traditions and began to show pride in their culture. Many students actively volunteered to bring in culturally significant artifacts to share about their culture. It was really neat to learn from them! Second, it has assisted students to better understand cultural diversity; our non-Aboriginal students can have a positive appreciation of the Aboriginal culture and vice versa. (grade one teacher, written reflection)

The teachers and advocates in the collaborative inquiry community experienced generative change on at least two levels: relational and pedagogical. The interactional space that was created for the teachers and advocates facilitated discourse that enabled them to think, plan, design, and talk together about what they were learning and how that could be realized in their classrooms. The project gave them a common theoretical vocabulary and functional concepts (Greeno, 2012) that mediated the way the partners organized their understandings of culturally responsive literacy practices and ways they could collaborate. Over five months, including three learning community sessions, participants' collaborative learning was mediated through co-creation of thought, experiences, and ongoing iterative dialogue between both school-based partners and colleagues from other sites:

Our advocate would add to our conversations, sharing her knowledge and expertise, and in turn, I would share my literacy knowledge/vocabulary so she could effectively help the students (grade one teacher, written reflection).

A very overwhelming feeling of relationship developed between the advocates and teachers, which of course, enhanced the learning for students. In particular the skills, knowledge and interests the advocates bring to the classrooms interrupted many teachers' beliefs about the value of the advocates in the schools. (district support teacher, email communication)

Bakhtin (1981) writes of an individual's ideological becoming through engagement with new perspectives, ideas, and voices. In this project, participants engaged with the discourses of others (including theory and Indigenous ways of knowing) which influenced the way they thought, the development of their own internal persuasive

discourse, and how they contributed to dialogue with others (Wells, 2007). These transformational shifts ultimately led to changes in educators' thoughts, beliefs, ideologies, and even ways of theorizing. A process of ideological becoming (Ball, 2009; Hedges, 2015; Wells, 2007) contributed to an increased sense of agency, voice, and efficacy for many teachers. For example, collaboration mediated an opening for knowledge creation and space for Indigenous knowledge holders in classrooms:

The Aboriginal Advocate I have been working with gives my students the gift of her knowledge about Aboriginal culture in a way that I am not able to on my own... We sit in a circle and use a talking stick to share about our feelings and sometimes our questions. She has modeled for me how to go about telling an Aboriginal story and how to teach my students about the symbolism in them. (grade one teacher, email communication)

Moll (2014) leans on Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory to say that teachers change themselves in the process of helping to mobilize funds of knowledge for teaching and learning by working with others to help change classrooms for the better. Beyond possessing subject matter and methodological knowledge, "teachers need to develop through their activities a sense of group spirit with which the soul of the school must be infused" (p. 154). Wrestling with theory/practice relationships and tensions, drawing in personal and professional funds of knowledge, and questioning their beliefs about purposes of and practices within education, both transformed and repaired participants' assumptions and beliefs. To live within a school community is to be an integral contributing part of its innermost fundamental reason for being. Collaborative inquiry offers teachers a venue for this learning:

Lastly, from a teacher standpoint, I enjoyed working alongside my advocate and building bridges between my parents in our First Nations community. My advocate became a member of our classroom...My Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents really appreciated seeing their cultures highlighted in the students' books. (grade one teacher, written reflection)

The Curriculum for All Project

Inclusive education literature encourages educators to find strength in and embrace diversity. This value, however, is not reflected in educational settings that still separate students by cognitive ability (Downing, 2008; Willis, 2007). When and if students with developmental disabilities are included, their classroom membership is rarely seen as creating learning opportunities with potential to benefit all students.

To address this issue, a collaborative, situated professional development initiative was offered in a school district comprising five rural and remote communities. Educators were invited to participate to inquire into their practice related to curricular access for students with a diverse range of abilities. A central design feature of the series involved attending to at least one case study student with a developmental disability, to be included in the curricular plan, as these students are often taught separately or not included in the planning of conceptually rich curricula (Milsom, 2006).

The Curriculum for All inquiry-oriented professional development project offered educators an opportunity to explore this tension in their practice by collaboratively planning instruction, that from the onset, included all of their learners (Rose & Meyer, 2002; Schnellert, Watson, & Widdess, 2015; Villa & Thousand, 2005). The project brought together 10 teacher teams and a district administrator for five sessions between October and June. Together they explored the common question: “How can all students be meaningfully included and contribute in classes, regardless of cognitive ability?”

The facilitator of the project guided participants through various evidence-based planning frameworks including Response to Intervention (RTI), Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Rose & Meyer, 2002), Differentiated Instruction (DI) (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010), and Inquiry (Wilhelm, 2007) to (re)consider student diversity, not as a deficit, but rather as a generative foundation for instructional planning, assessment, and curriculum development.

The first session invited educators to (re)examine their philosophies of inclusive education. Here participants had the opportunity to discuss tensions, articulate their beliefs, and set practice goals addressing diversity in their contexts. Building their professional community of inquiry through the exploration of values, goals, and the aims of education was a foundation for these teachers to engage with and shift their practice. The second session required participants to look at evidence-based frameworks that support inclusion including RTI, UDL, DI and inquiry. Knowing their learners was foundational to designing the plan (Childre, Sands, & Pope, 2009), so teams co-developed a strength-oriented and diversity-positive profile of their class, an essential step in beginning the collaborative planning process. Collaboration partners then designed practices that responded directly to their class’s unique profile and characteristics (Schnellert et al., 2015).

In the third session, utilizing the new BC curriculum (BC Ministry of Education, 2014), teams focused on co-planning using UDL principles such as multiple means of engagement, action, and expression (Rose & Meyer, 2002). UDL principles were used as

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a framework for partners to consider how to increase access, participation, and progress for their diverse learners (Jimenez, Graf, & Rose, 2007; King-Sears, 2009),

The fourth session zoomed in to look specifically at students with developmental disabilities. Dialogue was facilitated and encouraged around how to make curricular goals meaningful for all students (Browder, 2001; Downing & McFarland, 2010), as well as, how students with cognitive diversity could contribute to the learning of everyone in the class.

Between the fourth and fifth sessions, collaborative teams implemented and adjusted their plans at the classroom level, an essential component to teacher inquiry (Hopkins & Levin, 2000), and returned to the fifth session ready to share with the larger inquiry community. Their presentations were organized around three guiding questions: “What did we try? What did we notice? And what did we learn?” This dual focus on practice and learning was intended to support educators to reflect on and explore their emerging knowledge and beliefs while also surfacing teaching practices that welcomed all learners as generative classroom learning community members. Conditions in the large group cross-team learning community meetings were developed to encourage purposeful transformation of classroom practice, but also discourse itself.

Although the large group shared a common overarching question, school collaboration partners were able to choose a lens through which to view their inquiry. The new British Columbia curriculum has organized core-competency areas described in overlapping and interactive themes (BC Ministry of Education, 2014). One team, for example, co-planned an English 8 poetry unit, while another planned a science/language arts cross-curricular unit in a grade 3/4 class. Other groups planned units focusing on nurturing students’ self-regulated learning or social responsibility.

Regardless of lens, one common goal for all teams was to plan according to their specific context. Given that each class had a diverse and unique profile, unit plans were designed with this in mind. One participant mentioned how his team, “planned for the class, rather than for a specific grade” (teacher reflection). This shift to student-centered planning and teaching freed teachers from one-size-fits-all teaching and instructional goals, resulting in more responsive teaching and learning.

Another common goal across the collaborative teams was to increase access to learning for all students. In every classroom, students brought diverse abilities, experiences, cultures, languages, and many other personal and social resources. By designing a unit and lessons with intent to draw upon and accommodate this diversity,

teachers provided their students with opportunities to connect their experiences and new information through interactions with others in their context (Childre et al., 2009). Additionally, teachers provided multiple access and challenge points within the design of their activities, rather than attempting to retrofit or simplify activities after the fact. A classroom teacher in the project described this as, “the launching point to reach all and adding challenges for the few” (teacher reflection).

A common theme in participants’ reflections was the increase in student engagement and participation when lessons welcomed and leveraged diversity as a resource to the classroom rather than a deficit. In her reflection, a resource teacher supporting an English class explained how, “the students LOVED it! They were proud of their work...and wanted to share and listen to each other” (teacher reflection). Another noticed how, “it really increased student engagement with each lesson” (teacher reflection). This is not surprising as research supports an increase in academic engagement when classrooms are designed following UDL principles (Park, Holloway, Arendtsz, Bempechat, & Li, 2012).

An interesting shift was how teachers noticed students beginning to push themselves further because of the lack of stigma around success and/or failure. Everyone was learning together, but in a variety of ways. A teacher working with a group of secondary students noted how, “[the responsive planning] motivated students to do better than average; they usually were content to do the minimum because their friends were doing that (teacher reflection).” This may have to do with the growing research explaining the power of self-regulated learning in supporting students to control challenge and develop efficacy to understand and complete tasks successfully (Butler & Schnellert, 2012; Zimmerman, 2008; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). This was evident in teacher reflections. One described how students’ perceptions of challenge and ability started to shift, “students who were capable, but lacked self esteem were much quicker to jump into an [activity] when lessons were universally designed. As a result, they passed their own expectations. It made the learning seamless.”

The most common theme in the presentations and reflections was how the participants noticed the benefits of working together. Teams were all given time and support to co-plan and implement their units and activities. Every team mentioned how beneficial this was for drawing on one another’s expertise and experience in planning to capitalize on the diversity of their specific classes. An additional pattern in participants’ responses was how the planning frameworks proved a needed scaffold to teams, allowing them to utilize each other as productive resources. A resource teacher described this saying, “collaboration using [planning] frameworks gave a clear understanding of how to include ALL staff into the planning and implementation

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of lessons [including resource teachers and educational assistants]" (written reflection). Collaboration was a key ingredient in teachers' inquiries and professional development, enabling them to construct, monitor, and adapt their practices in a supportive community.

One particularly popular strategy for creating access in activities and lessons was utilizing diverse and multiple texts in classes (Schnellert et al., 2015). From a UDL perspective, a diverse text set provides multiple engagement and representation points for students; this was a strategy that many teams took advantage of. By designing texts for students with developmental disabilities, teachers extended their understandings of literacy and differentiation. As teachers shared their text set as a work in progress, they provoked each other to increase textual modalities and reading levels as part of curriculum design. Teachers referred to this as a significant moment of praxis regarding the creation of entry points for student participation in content area learning with peers. Providing this level of access was a source of learning for many participants, one teacher mentioned that, "making sure that ALL students [were included] in lessons made me realize how I was missing this in the past" (teacher reflection).

Although careful attention was paid to specific supports that individual students required to be successful, when implemented, these supports were utilized by whomever needed them and many teachers noticed this universal benefit. In a K/1 class focusing on self-regulation, for example, a corner of the classroom was designed as a calming space for a particular student who became anxious, but when it came time to implement this strategy, the classroom teacher realized that, "our target student for the 'calming space' was not the first student to independently access it" (field notes). Additionally, in a secondary Social Studies class, a classroom teacher quickly learned, "when I started teaching for ALL, I noticed that some of my other students had an easier job comprehending the material" (written reflection).

All teachers in the Curriculum for All Project experienced shifts in their practice, and they linked these shifts to the power of the inquiry community. This initiative highlights the potential of inquiry-oriented professional development models to support teachers to rethink their practice in equity-oriented ways. Embedding extended dialogue and reflection time into such initiatives can support teacher to reexamine and align their beliefs about diversity and inclusive education. At the end of the project one teacher wrote, "having special needs kids in the class helped EVERYONE feel included...I now will always start with ALL," while another noted, "I am learning that inclusion is more than just 'dreaming' of how I think school should be," and a third reflected, "I left every session thinking, I'm going to change the world because now I have a plan!"

These 20 educators make up one fifth of the entire teaching force in this geographically spread out, rural school district. Together these educators shifted discourse regarding students with developmental disabilities, framing them as productive members of a their classrooms who can positively impact the learning of their peers and teachers.

Discussion

Collaborative models of teacher inquiry have the potential to engage teachers in not only shifting their instructional practices and theoretical understandings, but also the structures they work within. These two dialogically focused inquiry groups helped teachers persevere in the exploration and application of new ideas. Educators participating in these inquiry communities were able to envision and enact pluralistic representations and practices of knowing that challenged school- and system-level normative expectations of student achievement. A key component in each of these inquiry groups was that a community of educators came together with a question and/or challenge specific to their students and practice and inquired deeply over time. Clarke and Erickson (2004) note that there is “general agreement that most claims about learning are largely dependent upon the context of the learning environment... [and] the inherent situated and contextually-bound nature of learning” (p. 45). We propose that researchers and learning community facilitators cannot ignore the situated nature of learning and teaching and the myriad factors that impact educators’ professional development. In these examples, a focus on situated dialogue attending to social/discursive factors, combined with the goals teachers set and the actions they took made a difference at multiple levels, informing practice and changing perspectives across the inquiry community. Perhaps most importantly, teachers (re)positioned their work as diversity-positive and drew on their students’ funds of knowledge to develop their own pedagogical funds of knowledge.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) confirm:

teacher research as an agency for classroom and school change. The premise of this approach is that teachers generate local knowledge of teaching, learning and schooling when they make classrooms and schools sites for research, work collaboratively in inquiry communities, and take critical perspectives on the theory and the research of others. This work pays particular attention to the discourse of learning communities, the conjoined efforts of teachers and students as inquirers, and the role of inquiry in the fields of literacy and curriculum. (p. 18)

In both of these examples, the researcher-facilitator created opportunities for critical reflection. Cranton (1996) suggests that,

critical reflection is the central process in transformative learning. Our natural human interest in emancipation drives us to reflect on the ways we see ourselves, our history, our knowledge, and our social roles [and] if we see that we are constrained or oppressed by any of our perspectives. (p. 75)

Sustained exploration of and reflection related to equity-oriented theory and practices played a role in challenging educators' views of social dimensions of their classrooms and schools.

In essence, this work troubles the notion of teacher as doer, not thinker; manager, not scholar (Winter, 2000). As we analyzed data, we wondered how and when the teachers in these inquiry communities became comfortable surfacing and honoring multiple perspectives within their classrooms and with one another. Our analyses only begin to reveal how the inquiry communities work as a mediating structure allowing teachers to develop intersubjective ways of knowing and transacting while adding to their funds of pedagogy (Moll, 2014). We can see that change occurred; for example, approaches like the community circle in the Indigenous Early Literacy Project made a difference in helping non-dominant voices have a valued and equal place in both inquiry community meetings and classrooms. But more attention in future studies needs to delve into discursive practices such as the emergent nature of teachers' talk in relation to their practice. We have scratched the surface here. In addition, we need to focus on if and when (and how) teachers tackled systemic barriers (policies, school structures, historical racism) in the same way they worked to make their classrooms more inclusive and reconstituted student success to build from students' strengths and funds of knowledge. Within these two PD examples, inquiry community members shared responsibility for theorizing equity-oriented pedagogy and found agency to create conditions that increased access and success for learners. In particular, educators spoke of how working as school-based inquiry partners and then coming together in the cross-school learning community sustained and propelled their learning—providing opportunities to be inspired and challenged by colleagues. In both of the PD initiatives discussed here, educators shared how participating in collaborative practitioner inquiry as part of cross-school learning communities resulted in new ways of viewing student diversity, not as a problem, but instead as a generative foundation for instructional planning, assessment, and curriculum development.

Conclusion

While teachers in the Aboriginal Early Literacy Project and the Curriculum for All Project lived in different communities and taught in different schools in their school districts, they similarly drew from theory, their students, and one another to inform the questioning of their beliefs, assumptions, and practices. While inquiry partners worked together to successfully implement ideas in their schools, they found coming together in larger inquiry communities critical in challenging and transforming their dispositions to diversity as a resource to their teaching and learning. Across participants in both sites, a key attribute of professional development was recognizing and capitalizing on both students' and teachers' funds of knowledge to transform curriculum, pedagogy, and relationships. Providing and facilitating dialogue within learning community meetings—where teachers deconstructed and reconstructed their professional knowledge and practice—helped them to possibilize as part of their inquiry. Time to deliberate, explore, and co-create with theory and their own students in mind should be a central component in such initiatives. Diversity creates opportunities for learning, clarifying, translating, making the hidden curriculum explicit, challenging it, and seeking to find potential in learners and contexts.

Interestingly, educators in these two initiatives spoke of changes in their practice as critical in helping them see and discuss their beliefs, assumptions, and learning. This suggests that professional development initiatives benefit from teachers engaging in cycles of action and reflection as they consider social, cultural, and cognitive diversity within their lived experiences. Social justice-oriented professional development benefits teachers when it can support systemic, situated cycles of action and collaborative reflection. The interactional spaces created among community-based inquiry groups can act as mediating structures in which new avenues of discourse and pedagogy are discovered, co-created, assimilated, and collaboratively internalized as functional concepts. In these instances, social justice, equity, context, and student funds of knowledge become the curriculum. In professional development where teachers inquire into the generativity of diversity and plan from and draw on student and teacher funds of knowledge, students and teachers have opportunities to become active agents possibilizing curriculum as situated, co-constructed, and responsive.

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Rediscovering the Self Through Self-Reflection and Transformative Learning

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the relevancy and potential benefits of self-reflection and reflective practice in promoting personal and professional development. In addition, it reviews the concept of transformative learning in conjunction with self-reflection since the two constructs connect to each other as well as to the process of human development. Moreover, different educational programs and activities that increase the likelihood of change and transformation are discussed. Lastly, this article concludes with my personal reflections on my learning and growth as I adapted to change and navigated new environments while studying abroad in Great Britain.

Shared Humanity

All human beings will struggle with their mortality, experience disappointments, and encounter unpredictable problems. How people work through their emotions, manage their thoughts, and respond to different situations can determine whether they remain psychologically stagnant or find new ways of feeling, thinking, and behaving. The steps that people take to obtain new knowledge and grow as human beings vary widely. Each person's path appears unique. However, a broader perspective reveals the presence of a "shared humanity" and existence of universal experiences that invisibly unite all humanity (Silverman, 2008). Universal experiences and emotions related to doubt, fear, and loss transcend professional boundaries and individual differences. Regardless of the profession,

everybody is in the process of becoming, including educators (Silverman, 2008). Palmer (1998) believed that the act of teaching, “tugs at the heart, opens the heart, [and] breaks the heart” (p. 11).

Learners and educators, patients and doctors, and clients and counselors possess this “shared humanity” and “universality” (Kottler, 2002; Rosin, 2015; Silverman, 2008). Everybody will encounter unplanned events and situations that can serve as openings for them to question who they are personally and professionally. These openings may allow individuals to examine the gaps in their lives, reconnect with their career passion, and rebuild their identity (Morgan, 2010). The individuals’ state of mind and purposeful intention will affect their learning and growth (Morgan, 2010; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010; Schön, 1987). This article explores the relevancy and potential benefits of self-reflection and reflective practice in promoting student growth and professional development. In addition, it reviews the concept of transformative learning in conjunction with self-reflection since the two constructs connect to each other and influence both education and human development. Moreover, I also discuss possible activities that are more likely to foster change and transformation. Lastly, this article concludes with my personal reflections while studying abroad in Great Britain.

The Value of Self-Reflection

Authors such as Paulo Freire, Parker Palmer, Jack Mezirow, and Donald Schön helped to explain the nature of human beings while providing insights into the learning process and the field of education (Freire & Freire, 1994; Mezirow, 1991; Palmer, 1998; Schön, 1983, 1991). With greater insights about the learning process and change in teaching approach, a shift has occurred. Educators are transitioning from the teacher-centered classroom model to a student-centered approach, which focuses more on self-reflection, self-understanding, and transformative education (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010; Schön, 1983; Silverman, 2008). In addition, a greater number of scholarly literature is studying the link between emotional and cognitive growth and self-reflection. The use of reflective practice is contributing to the knowledge of transformative learning (Illeris, 2014; Kinsella, 2007; Morgan, 2010; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010; Schön, 1983; Stevens-Long, Schapiro, & McClintock, 2012).

The growing interest in self-awareness, self-reflection, and transformation has extended beyond the field of education and is used in a variety of career fields (Chiaromonte & Mills, 1993; Schön, 1983; Silverman, 2008; Stevens-Long et al., 2012).

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In education, the importance of self-awareness and self-reflection is not a novel concept and has been associated with experiential learning and student development (Ixer, 1999; Jordi, 2011; Lawrence-Wilkes & Ashmore, 2014; Mezirow, 1991; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010; Rosin, 2015; Schön, 1987). When working with students, educators are more acutely aware of the transitory state of a human being—ever changing, adapting, and transforming according to experiential, situational, relational, and social contexts. To understand the state of another person, while gaining insight into the self, educators must not only consider the relationship in place and context involved, but also have a developed sense of self-awareness (Chiaromonte & Mills, 1993; Schön, 1983, 1987; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010).

Educators in counseling, social work, healthcare, and other areas have incorporated the use of self-reflection and reflective techniques into their training programs (Ixer, 1999; Kinsella, 2007; Mezirow, 1991; Schön, 1983, 1987; Silverman, 2008; Stevens-Long et al., 2012). The term “self-reflection” has a range of definitions and associations and plays a key role in the learning process (Rosin, 2015; Schön, 1991). Theoretically, self-reflection and reflective practice account for the type of learning and development that extends beyond the confines of scientific and technological means of solving problems and resolving difficulties, which are found in the application process and exist as “problems of practice” (Kinsella, 2007, p. 103). Learning may consist of re-examining a particular meaning, providing a meaningful explanation for an event, or testing the validity of inner thoughts by taking action (Kinsella, 2007; Mezirow, 1991). Reflective learning may result in finding new meaning, confirming previous experiences, adding new knowledge, and obtaining insights that are more comprehensive (Kinsella, 2007; Mezirow, 1991; Schön, 1983). Mezirow (1991) believed that self-reflection is critical for intentional learning to occur. Chiaromonte and Mills (1993) defined self-reflection as a “deliberative and conscious process in which the person evaluates self image and self direction with a view of taking control of the way the self is shaped” (p. 145).

Literature exploring theoretical perspectives, methodical structure, and assessment of self-reflection is inconsistent and debatable. However, numerous authors see the potential benefits of self-reflection in student learning and professional development (Ixer, 1999; Kinsella, 2007; Lawrence-Wilkes & Ashmore, 2014; Mezirow, 1991; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010; Schön, 1983). For educators, the use of self-reflection and reflective practices can help them to better guide themselves through their personal experiences and improve their work. Self-reflection is a valuable tool that has the potential to be transformative in many disciplines and career fields. In counseling and mental health education, the practitioners’ ability to be helpful and harmful is dependent on their own self-awareness and knowledge of themselves (Rosin, 2015; Schön, 1991; Stevens-Long et

al., 2012). Implicit and explicit expectations, attributed characteristics from others, and the individual's "sense of self" contribute to the person's overall self-image and identity.

The ability to gain self-awareness and be reflective allows space for future growth and learning. Without the ability to self-reflect, character traits that are more individualistic, competitive, and manipulative can increase and become destructive (Chiaromonte & Mills, 1993; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010; Schön, 1983). For instance, without teaching the importance of self-reflecting, self-checking, and critically evaluating experiences, counselor educators may simply teach students to mimic behaviors that appear to be "effective." Thus, future counselors may lack the ability and therapeutic competency to consider negative implications, evaluate ethical guidelines, and resolve ambiguities and conflicting needs (Chiaromonte & Mills, 1993; Schön, 1983, 1991; Silverman, 2008; Skovholt & Jennings, 2005; Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992). While reviewing the potential benefits of self-reflection, Chiaromonte and Mills (1993) also warned against extreme forms of self-reflection and self-awareness. Much like other personal characteristics and abilities that may go unchecked, overemphasis of self-emphasis and self-reflection may lead to self-absorption and self-importance instead of reduction of self-ignorance.

Self-Reflection, Change, and Transformative Learning

Associated with the concept of self-reflection and reflective practice is the notion of transformation and change. Literature addressing the topic of spirituality, religion, personal development, and adult education commonly mentions both self-reflection and transformative learning (Morgan, 2010; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010; Schön, 1987). Transformative learning may involve change within a person's identity and sense of self (Illeris, 2014; Rosin, 2015). The terms *transformative education* and *transformative learning* vary slightly between authors and theories. Transformative learning may refer to the outcome caused by the change, the learning that occurred within the individual, and the educational method and program involved (Mezirow, 1991; Stevens-Long et al., 2012). In many cases, transformative learning is a term that refers to the "intra-psychic and/or behavioral process of a learner involved in a transformative experience—it is about what the learner does, feels, and experiences" (Stevens-Long et al., 2012, p. 184). The concept includes feelings of disorientation, critical reflection about personal experiences, examination of assumptions, and search for new meaning. Like the concept of self-reflection, transformative learning is connected to attaining a sense of universality, tapping into a spiritual and religious sense of being, and viewing the

self in relation to other people and communities. Researchers believed that certain environmental dynamics and features promote change and transformative learning; however, they did not provide clear distinctive characteristics that contribute to transformative learning (Illeris, 2014; Morgan, 2010; Stevens-Long et al., 2012).

Transformation can generally occur in a variety of contexts and generate emotions of “universality” combined with an awareness of differences (Kottler, 2002; Morgan, 2010). The context can be a physical place or a psychological state (Morgan, 2010). Involvement in outdoor activities, experience of psychological stress and life dilemmas, and perplexity caused by changing environments will disrupt old routines and habits and increase the likelihood of personal development and transformation (Morgan, 2010; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010; Stevens-Long et al., 2012). The amount of change and transformation that takes place is not solely dependent on external factors. Internal factors like the person’s readiness and motivation will also influence his or her probability of having a transformative experience.

New and unfamiliar environments have the potential to stimulate transformation within individuals by alleviating monotony and challenging established routines (Kottler, 2002; Morgan, 2010; Stevens-Long et al., 2012). Kottler (2002) believed that unfamiliarity with a new environment might change people’s mindset and allow individuals a chance to re-examine their perception of themselves and question pre-existing worldviews. Ordinary routines that once worked in an accustomed environment may not work in a new setting. The unfamiliarity, confusion, and disorientation that are typically associated with moving to a new location can stimulate emotions that activate new, innovative responses and reactions that facilitate change (Kottler, 2002).

Activities like travelling to foreign geographical locations and experiencing new cultures can better activate an adequate amount of disorientation and discomfort to facilitate change and transformation (Morgan, 2010). Obtaining a deeper sense of purpose through participating in intercultural dialogue, protecting the environment, and volunteering to help people may improve an individual’s chances of having a transformative experience (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010). The external environment, along with a great sense of purpose, may potentially promote inner psychological growth within individuals (Morgan, 2010; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010). The new setting disrupts established habits and challenges people’s existing perspectives and worldviews and makes room for self-exploration and self-discovery. A new place and location offer new scenes and experiences that motivate people to develop new ways to live and survive. The characteristics of the new physical environment, in combination with the explorer’s

interactions, can either promote or hinder the chances of having a transformative experience (Kottler, 2002; Morgan, 2010; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010).

Since emotional and intellectual struggles can also be experiential and have a transformative effect, normal life events, such as the death of a loved one, or strategic interventions, such as an educational and developmental program, may initiate change within a person (Morgan, 2010; Stevens-Long et al., 2012). Human difficulties and dilemmas can arise without any physical relocation. Sometimes certain landscapes, landmarks, nature, and the wilderness can hold special meaning and potentially have transformative powers. Consequently, even local places can provide new perspectives and experiences (Kottler, 2002; Morgan, 2010; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010). Educational programs and activities that offer opportunities for small groups of people to gain new experiences and participate in self-reflection and reflective practices can facilitate change. Travel, contemplative experiences, communion with nature, and cross-cultural interaction can all be transformative.

A Personal Reflection

As a third-year doctoral student who has worked as a career development professional for more than 10 years, I have stressed the importance of self-reflection and experiential learning for others but neglected myself. Only recently has the prospect arisen for me to apply the same philosophy and principles to my own experience. As I reflect upon the changes in my life over the past three years, I am now able to see how random circumstances and situations contributed to changes in my personal and professional life. First, I made a decision to return to school and pursue a doctorate in counseling and counselor education degree. Second, I left a familiar role as a career services professional to become a training specialist, which involved relocating to a new university. Then, I participated in a study-abroad trip to Great Britain and gained a different perspective about my relationship with others and myself.

As a first-generation college student and an Asian-American woman who has grown up in the United States (US), I expected to see many similarities between the US and Great Britain. I anticipated minor language difficulties and did not worry about experiencing any culture shock. At the same time, I was aware that my personality could influence my interaction with group members on the trip and with the people whom I encounter. I am naturally quiet and reserved, while being able to be quite direct when needed. When meeting with new people, I am not very talkative. Besides exchanging typical

greetings, I like to listen to people and ask few questions. In social settings, counseling sessions, and classrooms, I am comfortable when there is silence and think that it is “normal.” In familiar environments, I have my regular, normal routines and go through each day without much thought. In new settings, however, I must consciously make an extra effort to adapt to the environment and interact with the people around me.

Since the US and Great Britain share a common language, I relied on my preexisting knowledge to communicate. However, when I visited Scotland, I was aware that my comfort level varied according to slight variations of the Scottish accents. As I listened to a group of seven people in Scotland talk about their approach to change and therapy, I noticed my ability to decipher certain words and phrases changed depending on the accents. This reminded me of regional differences that exist in the US and the variety of southern and northern dialects. In counseling and counselor education, the counselors’ own language and background influences the ease with which they are able to understand and relate to their clients and students. I noticed that I had to be more attentive to accents less familiar to me. In a different situation, as I listened to a ticket salesperson give directions, I misheard the street “Knightsbridge” and mistakenly heard “Ninth Street.” Later that night, I found myself thinking about how I heard “Ninth Street” instead of “Knightsbridge” when the salesperson tried to give directions. Since I was not familiar with “Knightsbridge,” I had unintentionally converted an unfamiliar street to a common street name I knew in the US. I wondered how many times I had missed the true meaning in a conversation by inaccurately hearing and incorrectly translating something that was unfamiliar to me to something more familiar.

In another situation, the new environment, along with an unexpected event, caught me off guard and made me reconsider my normal routine. While on a train, I needed to use the “toilet” and walked to the back of the train. Once I got to the location, I opened the unlocked, rotating door to the restroom and was surprised by the site of a woman sitting on the toilet. After a brief exchange of shocked expressions, frantic movements, and shaken woman’s departure, I had the opportunity to examine the interior of the stall and learned that the restroom door and toilet operated with different buttons. There were different buttons to operate the door and toilet, along with a special button to request help from personnel. Although I did not require any assistance and did not remember pressing the help button, two male employees greeted me when I exited the door. Once I told the two men that I did not need any assistance, they scurried away, perhaps sensing my embarrassment. In the moment, I felt embarrassed by the toilet incident. However, I realized later that these unexpected circumstances and unpredictable events help break established routines in learning environments and promote change. The unexpected experience reminded me to slow down before

walking into an unfamiliar setting and showed me a different way of operating and functioning as a person.

The past three years shifted my view and perspective of the world. I learned to adapt to changes in circumstances and environments and grew as a professional. The trip to Great Britain reminded me of the value of professional development, importance of self-reflection, and significance of transformative education. After having time to reflect upon my experiences, I have a stronger connection to humanity and a better understanding of the human condition. As educators and human beings, we will continue to search for new passions, reinvent ourselves, and find our place in the universe. The opportunity to see and remember similarities and differences between cultures, peoples, and experiences, locally, nationally, and internationally reminded me of my personal choice to help others and work in higher education. Visiting with the people in Great Britain, experiencing people pass by right and left in Victoria Station, enjoying the scenery during the train rides between Scotland, Wales, and England, and looking out into the vast North Sea in Scotland made me feel “small” and “big” at the same time. My sense of time and space, view of unique individuals and group identity, knowledge of breadth and depth of cultural worldviews and way of life intersected like different train routes in Great Britain. I see myself as an ordinary person bound to others by universal struggles, a unique individual with my own personality and life experiences, a professional unbounded by traditional paths and specific positions, a contributor to society, and a global citizen.

Implications

Due to the variety of definitions and theories available, clarification of the term *self-reflection* is needed prior to the development of any new program. Educators can start the process by exploring details connected to the definitions of self-reflection and transformative learning. Choosing a particular model to help guide the reflective process and educational program could help to provide the structures needed. Applying Mezirow’s three levels of learning and self-reflection that involve content, process, and premises may offer a more comprehensive understanding of the concept (Rosin, 2015). Having a clearer understanding of the self-reflection process and its applicability to teaching will help to guide the learning objectives for different activities and programs, which ultimately influences the learning outcome and growth opportunities. Transformative learning does not necessarily require international travel, a rigid program structure, or complete environmental control; therefore, educational

activities and programs can be flexible and creative. Unpredictable experiences that program participants may encounter can contribute to their development and learning (Kottler, 2002; Morgan, 2010).

New environments and activities that create a sufficient amount of internal conflict and distress can offer openings for learning and change to occur. An educational program with a small group of people in an unfamiliar setting may adequately challenge the routine and daily comfort of living in the familiar. As mentioned earlier, educators need to monitor the level of anxiety and stress experienced by program participants and strategically include screening and support systems to optimize the chances for transformative learning. Assessing the participants' readiness by evaluating their cognitive and emotional ability to process their experiences and reviewing the appropriateness of the new environment based on the intended outcome may help to determine an individual's fit for a program. In addition, providing mentors, coaches, and collegial support to help participants cope with stress, develop new adaptive strategies, and obtain meaningful experiences can promote transformative learning (Kottler, 2002; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010; Rosin, 2015).

Conclusion

A self-reflective, transformative experience is an existential and spiritual type of experience and should not be confused with an act of escape and denial of reality. The state of mind and intentionality of a traveler visiting a new country or new environment influences the quality of the experience, type of learning acquired, and meaning associated with the visit. The key to supporting transformative learning is to ensure that there is an adequate amount of disorientation and disturbance, along with sufficient relational support, to shift patterns of behaviors towards transformation (Kottler, 2002; Morgan, 2010; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010; Stevens-Long et al., 2012). Too great a disorientation and disequilibrium may create too much anxiety and discomfort and interfere with transformation and growth. Undergoing internal conflicts, grappling with the process of self-questioning, and redefining an identity are common elements of the learning and growth process (Jordi, 2011; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010; Rosin, 2015). The endeavor to learn and grow as individuals is a universal reality shared by everybody worldwide, regardless of their profession.

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Trust and Witnessing: Lessons for Dance Education / Professional Development in Community

Miriam Torzillo

ABSTRACT

Dance education is rarely taught in Australian primary schools. A National Arts curriculum was published online in 2014, and ready for implementation the following year. Therefore schools and teachers will be looking for models and frameworks that will help them implement the arts, including dance. The author experienced the work of the community-based dance company Dance Exchange during a summer institute in 2013. For a teacher of dance in a relatively isolated regional town, taking part in the summer institute was a rare opportunity to nourish creative inspiration and a reminder of the importance of the collaborative creative process and the embodied experience within Dance Education.

 work as a dance specialist teaching creative dance in primary schools in regional Queensland, Australia, a geographical area with few Arts specialists. I also teach the Arts in pre-service teacher education and am a postgraduate student myself. Operating very much in isolation in my area of study means there are limited opportunities to network with colleagues and develop my professional practice. While there are many successful secondary dance programs here, there is very little dance education occurring in primary school education and rarely does it align with the curriculum, which actually foregrounds critical and creative thinking by positioning children and young people as artists (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2013).

Generalist classroom teachers who teach the arts do so often with limited or no knowledge of arts pedagogy. When there are no possibilities for professional

development within the school (Hardy, 2012; Lowrie, 2014; Mockler, 2013; Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013), and what is provided by education systems is limited to online digital objects, teachers might have to undertake their own professional development in the community. When teachers elect to challenge the system by choosing their own professional development path, it can become a political act.

Under performative agendas, professional development for teachers in Australia has become a means of satisfying external accountability measures and enforcing systemic priorities (Lingard, 2011), and may be implicit in the narrowing of pedagogic possibilities (Tuinamuana, 2011). As an arts educator, however, it is important to nurture the self, to apply aesthetic values “to one’s life, one’s existence” (Fornet-Betancourt, Becker, Gomez-Muller, & Gauthier, 1987, p. 362), and therefore to move beyond accountability to responsibility (Leonard, 2015).

In 2013, I took the opportunity to strengthen my own professional values and skills and to refresh my passion for and commitment to dance, by participating in the Dance Exchange Summer Institute as a student. The experience highlighted for me the relationship between the various roles I play. All of these roles, whether as dance educator, pre-service educator, community artist, dancer, or researcher, support each other. I was keenly aware during the Summer Institute of all these roles, their different impacts on my practice, and the importance of both practice and research to teaching (Beauchamp, Clarke, Hulme, & Murray, 2015). I have spent many years teaching and learning in Community Arts settings, where I witnessed its transformative effects on adults and children alike, due in large part to its collaborative and inclusive nature (Buys & Miller, 2009; Selkrig, 2011). This is in line with the commitment of leading Australian and international dance scholars and practitioners to a socially just pedagogy in dance (Garrett & Meiners, 2014). In this paper I explore the experience of the summer institute as an artistic, professional, and research opportunity that would contribute to the design of a pedagogic framework for teaching dance in the primary school.

Professional Development—Arts Education

A study of the professional development experiences of arts educators led to the design of a matrix as a tool for analyzing and predicting the impact those experiences would have on teacher transformation (Upitis, Smithrim, & Soren, 1999). The matrix describes the features of professional development experiences at three levels. The third level is suggested as meeting the conditions for profound and long-lasting change.

The first level is all about feeding the self, becoming part of a community of artists, making art and taking risks, exactly what we ask of our students. The second level comes into play when teachers develop enhanced or changed images of the value of the arts to children and in the curriculum. The third level has an impact on the teacher's personal and professional life, such that major changes are made to their own involvement in the arts and a more pro-active approach taken to consolidating and renewing their teaching practice (Upitis et al., 1999).

The Dance Exchange Summer Institute was not designed for teachers; it did not deal directly with pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment relevant to school teaching. However, it provided a high level of input at the first level: the nurturing of the self. While I have a strong artistic core around which my personal and teaching life is grounded, it is this first level—the nurturing of self, where I am lacking. As well, the summer institute awakened “a feeling of community, encouraged the taking of personal risks and ‘the creation of public artifacts’” (p. 27). It was a rich experience because of the way that practical movement work was driven by an aesthetic of inquiry, in which dance is seen as a social and political act that “dissolves binary categories and in its place creates new room for art-making that incorporates ‘tolerance, generosity [and] nimbleness’” (Cash, 2011, p. 1). Therefore, the ways of working were in line with a view of dance education that values communal creativity and is based on a “we” paradigm, rather than a competitive skills-based model (Chappell, 2007; Glăveanu, 2014).

Dance Education in the Curriculum

Current meanings of “dance education” in Australian primary education are diverse. This is because the way dance is taught in primary schools, or whether it is taught at all, varies enormously across and within states and school systems. It is timely to consider the value of dance in education and the meanings it could have within the new Australian National Arts Curriculum (ACARA, 2013). The curriculum makes clear the primacy of the creative process in arts learning, with two key organizing strands, “making and responding” (ACARA, 2013). This is in line with the philosophies and frameworks that first inspired the development of most dance curriculum and syllabi in dance education throughout the world (Laban, 1988). How Dance can and should take its place within Arts education more generally, and in the curriculum as a whole, is the subject of much discussion and debate among dance educators, researchers, and practitioners (Dundas, 2013). When this paper was being written the curriculum materials had gone online, but implantation lagged behind. ACARA has set an “entitlement” that The Arts should be

taught but not necessarily in every year. In this way, so it is ultimately the responsibility of schools acting within jurisdictional requirements to decide when, how, and what Arts will be taught (Queensland Studies Authority [QSA], 2011).

In Queensland, Australia, generalist classroom teachers of primary school (years 1-6) and music specialists will be called upon to enact this intended curriculum. This may ultimately favour a more inclusive approach to dance education. Whereas an artist in residence model gives precedence to the “gifted and talented” by apprenticing them to a “gifted dancer,” the remit of the classroom teacher is to “seek the potential in each person” (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2009, p. 74). The national curriculum makes clear the relationship between making and responding, and the possibility of collaborating with children to co-construct dance.

Making and Responding are intrinsically connected. Together they provide students with knowledge, understanding and skills as artists, performers and audience and develop students’ skills in critical and creative thinking. As students make artworks they actively respond to their developing artwork and the artworks of others; as students respond to artworks they draw on the knowledge, understanding and skills acquired through their experiences in making artworks. (ACARA, 2013)

A social constructivist approach is a suitable framework for authentic and productive learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Dance, if taught as intended by the curriculum, positions children as artists and audiences; foregrounding the primacy of making dance (Schiller & Meiners, 2003). Dance empowers, when it is taught as a creative process, incorporating students’ unique ideas and expressions and taking account of their life worlds and experiences (Garrett & Meiners, 2014). According to state and national quality frameworks, teachers in Queensland are bound to foster inclusive practices in their classrooms (Berlach & Chambers, 2011). Community dance could therefore provide a source of inspiration for dance education because it is based on “process-oriented values’, including: a focus on participants; collaborative relationships; inclusive practice; opportunities for positive experiences and celebration of diversity” (Amans, 2008, p. 10). It is therefore an accessible and relevant site for professional development of arts educators in the absence of any face-to-face learning offered by systems. For teachers, it is an opportunity to experience the embodied expression of dance and collaborative creativity for themselves and an insight into what the process could be like for the children they teach (Buck, 2005).

Methodological Approach

My research charts my personal teaching and learning journey and that of other teachers to further understand the lived curriculum of dance in primary schools and work toward the formulation of a pedagogical framework for teaching it. Case study was used to contain the diverse forms of data, including stories of the researchers' practice and the practice of other teachers; and the engagement and responses of students (Yin, 2014).

This qualitative study was undertaken in regional Queensland Australia. In the first setting during a dance residency taught by the researcher: a research journal was kept; three teachers completed reflective questionnaires and focus group interviews, reflective conversations and mind-mapping conducted with small groups of children from each class. In the other: participant observation of Dance lessons, in three classes taught by a classroom music teacher new to teaching dance was undertaken over two terms; teacher interviews, student reflections, and focus groups were conducted and Dance lessons videoed to produce a thick description of the context. In the third, a class was observed, two teacher interviews conducted and student reflections recorded. Lastly, an auto-ethnographic account of the first author's experiences teaching dance in regional Queensland in urban, rural, and isolated settings, and an ongoing professional conversation with a colleague were included to add detail to this picture of the dance experience of primary school students and teachers.

In this paper, narrative accounts drawn from these diverse settings were selected to assist in a discussion of issues of professional development for teachers in Dance. Furthermore, I wanted to use my own community dance experience to consider how such settings could be of value to generalist teachers seeking to expand their understanding of arts and specifically of dance relevant to the primary school classroom.

The research takes an ontological stance that recognizes the body as an active contributor in thinking and interpreting and values the body's ability to make meaning. In contrast are the impacts on education of technologies that lead to a "repelling of the 'real' or physical world . . . producing a distancing . . . impacting not only on our spatio-temporal actions 'in-the-world' but also on our emotional 'with-the-world' and 'with-others-in-the-world'" (Thwaites, 2011, p. 4).

Dance is intrinsically social; it is, therefore, an ideal medium for social and emotional learning (Bresler, 2004; Buck, 2003). Dance, if taught as aesthetic education, offers a

“distinct and humanizing pedagogy (Bannon & Sanderson, 2000, p. 10). Viewing this situation through an embodied lens expands the idea of the community of learners (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978) to include the physical as well as the conceptual and affective aspects. The embodied perspective seeks to bridge the divide between body and mind and emphasizes the interaction between the inner perception of movement and the outward expression (Bresler, 2004).

“Embodiment” entails the union of the mind and body in action or the act of using knowledge produced by the body. Epistemologically, there is a recognition that there are different, integrated ways of knowing and being (Fitzgerald, 2012). According to Liz Lerman, founder of Dance Exchange, because learning is an embodied process, teachers need to utilize the bodies’ understanding and awareness in order to teach holistically (Lerman, 2011).

Research Informed by Practice

Any approach to pedagogy must be based on context, on the real situations of students and teachers. Its credibility will be based on its authenticity. Readers will judge how, or if, it resonates with their situations and experiences. It is not just to literature that one could look for models and frameworks for dance education, but in the real world of the practitioner. In 2013 I had the opportunity to attend a Dance Exchange Summer Institute in Washington, U.S. and to experience firsthand its approach to dance making, which until then I had known only from the company website and YouTube.

The experience led me to think about the possible application of its approach to an Australian primary school setting, and, in particular, its relevance to non-specialist teachers, primary generalists, and classroom music teachers. In line with the methodology of my post-graduate research, which is grounded in self-study, is an approach that regards research as an extension of the researcher’s life (Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang, 2010). I used this experience to enrich my own understanding as I develop a pedagogical framework for teaching dance in primary school classrooms. Schön (1987) used the term “reflective practicum” to describe a process of professional learning that integrates theoretical learning with practice such as found in a design studio, and therefore emphasizing “reflection in action.”

Dancing as Research

Dance Exchange is an intergenerational company of artists whose mission is “to create dances that arise from asking: Who gets to dance? Where is the dance happening? What is it about? Why does it matter?” (Dance Exchange, 2015a). At the heart of the work of Dance Exchange, or of my experience of their work, were the concepts of trust, witnessing, and a creative process involving both making and responding. Dance Exchange is committed to initiating the creative process in communities and ecosystems? “How and where we live should affect the ways in which we come together to make art” (Meador, 2013). The experience of co-creating dance with children can help to change teachers’ foundational understandings of important threshold concepts, including more inclusive definitions of dance and the dancer (Buck & Rowe, 2015). In dance education, threshold concepts include that everyone can dance; that there is no one truth about dance; and that every dance idea matters (Buck & Rowe, 2015). When children are allowed to create their own dance, working in self-selected groups they can connect to their life-worlds, experiences, cultural values, and personal tastes, and reflect the group/class identity as a group of dancers collaborating and joining together using shared movement vocabularies, tastes, and styles.

Trust within the Dance Exchange model is based on its methods for drawing ideas and inspiration from people and place: “Each of us has the right to move through our lives, to travel great and small distances with the power of our own bodies” (Meador, 2013). I looked for resonance in my own experience as recorded in my research diary at the end of a dance session with a class of eight year olds (their first creative dance class).

The teacher who had been observing asked, “Can anyone tell me what they learned?” Two students named elements of dance such as time or space and then a student put up her hand and said, “I learned that you don’t have to be perfect.”

I prized this comment because it highlighted the importance of an inclusive creative process and the need for teachers to trust in that. Arts education should be an opportunity to explore open-ended and complex problems (Eisner, 2002) and to engage in problem finding as well as problem solving (Craft, 2008). When children don’t have to “get it right” as they do in much of the rest of the curriculum, “playfulness and invention is enhanced” (Fraser et al., 2007, p. 63). If this were to happen, teachers would need to trust in the children’s ideas and be willing to build on them to develop dance in the classroom. This has been borne out by my observations of a classroom where a teacher was attempting dance classes for the first time. The following images and

researcher's diary document the developing relationship and trust between teacher and students in my first research site.



Fig. 1: Students working out the dance problem

Students seem to take seriously the dance problem they had been given to solve and were willing to practice as a group to get it right. Even though they lacked strategies for refining and rehearsing, they stuck at it. The pleasure of achievement was palpable; children showed an interest when the teacher valued what they knew, validated their experience as interesting, and invited questioning. I saw this in one child's obvious pleasure in achievement during the lesson and his response to a positive affirmation of his movement choices.

“When the emphasis [is] placed upon the pedagogical practice of constructing knowledge, then dialogue and negotiation of meanings and actions became evident” (Buck, 2005, p.30). This emphasis is more relatable for a generalist teacher, as opposed to a skills- or technique-based approach.

Positive interaction between the teacher and students was apparent when she took an interest by watching attentively, praising their concentration or persistence, commenting on their movement choices, and encouraging further development of ideas. This was evident when a student responded to the teacher’s encouragement by smiling, turning to his Dance partner and taking him in hand to return enthusiastically to Dance making. This same student had spent the first few lessons with his head bowed and one arm crossed behind his back holding the other arm, hardly making eye contact.

The nature of the dance event described in the anecdotes above, and the teaching and learning that took place, found its structure and some of its meaning from the dance strand within the then Queensland Arts Essential Learnings curriculum (Queensland Studies Authority [QSA], 2011). To some extent, it was constrained by this, as it was by the need to manage behaviour and maintain control. Yet, in comparison to the pedagogy used in generalist classrooms, it was collaborative, provided an element of choice in creating dance, and the freedom to “be” in the body (Stinson, 1997). Students responded to these differences and seemed to adjust to the degree of self-control, persistence, and cooperation it required. My classroom observations documented what was possible, given willingness on the teacher’s part to try and to not be afraid of making mistakes, in a non-judgmental space. In addition, there seems to be something in the nature of creative dance that itself is empowering. Bannon and Sanderson (2000) argue that improvisation “encapsulates the essential nature of dance” (p. 18). Despite struggles with behaviour management on the teacher’s part and struggles with self-consciousness or uncertainty on the children’s, the project resulted in new understandings of the possibilities for dance.

Equipping teachers with an understanding of the verbal language of dance elements, what they mean in practice and some basic choreographic tools, is the key to getting them started in dance education (Ashley, 2005; Buck, 2009; Gross, 2011; Warburton, 2008). “If teachers can see dance as springing from the children’s own movement ideas, rather than from preordained steps, then including dance education in their classroom will be more approachable, achievable and inclusive” (Ashley, 2005, p. 10). All teachers have the ability to teach dance, not just dancers or trained dance teachers, if encouraged to develop the confidence to become skilled dance educators

(Thraves & Williamson, 1994). A shift in thinking about dance from skills training to a form of bodily research might help to alleviate teachers' fears.

Trust and Witnessing

On the first day of Dance Exchange Summer Institute, we spent the day at the Anacostia Community Museum, at an exhibition based on the histories and ecologies of the river, and at the Anacostia River itself. This was to be the inspiration for the work that we would make in the following week. Provocations, improvisational tools, and scores were used to develop work that drew from stories and physical places. Many small dances were created, arranged, and performed on site. It was an exhausting but inspiring experience. The combination of museum and river meant that we were drawing on multiple meanings and sensations. The work was site specific. The philosophy and way of working echoed in the axiom, "gathering, moving, making," signifies trust in each individual's creative abilities and process, and trust in the choreographic processes they use as the foundation of their work. Feeling like a dancer again and part of this community was important.

Trust and an open approach to movement exploration are also woven through daily dance practice in classes conducted by the company. Weekly open movement classes for the entire community are based on "the rich possibility of exchanges when people of all ages, backgrounds, abilities, and levels of experience come together in a creative process" (Dance Exchange, 2015b). Mathew Cumbie, one of the dance artists and teachers in the company, encouraged everyone in daily class to "get what you need from the class," describing the movement material taught as a container for individual and group exploration (personal communication, June 2013). Choreographic passes (movement from one side of the room to the other, using a movement rule or score, such as pouring weight into the floor or seeing and falling) were used in daily class as part of each dancer's "research." Further, there was no pressure to "perform" by using recognizable dance vocabulary or focus on technical proficiency.

This reaffirmed my own experience of seeing children absorbed in the process of making dance where there is an open approach to the exploration of a movement image. My journal documents my response to seeing a video of a sharing of dance improvisations by year four students (nine year olds).

He moves, with sustained, light, controlled energy; the body seeming to know where it should go next and how; the eyes following the hand . . . The boys in particular were focused on the task at hand. I was struck by their absorption in the movement. I believed I could 'see their thinking' as they moved.

And I was not the only one to have a strong response to the video. The quality of the movement, the concentration of the students, and the apparent transformation of the usually distracted and disruptive students surprised a classroom teacher, who had taught social dance to these same students. Here they were in what seemed to be 'rapt attention to the task', those same students who normally had difficulty attending to the teacher or to learning. She was like me, taken aback by the quality of their movement.

Dance education is said to be an opportunity for "the expansion of our perceptive powers and therefore apprehension of the world that goes beyond surface to expressive and symbolic meanings" (Bannon & Sanderson, 2000, p. 13). For Dance Exchange, witnessing is important in the gathering of movement ideas, and the process of moving and making of dance. The use of witnessing here is related to the structured form of movement called Authentic Movement involving a mover and a witness, in which the witness provides non-evaluative verbal feedback to the mover; however, in this instance the roles are not so clearly defined because both may be involved in moving and the witness may provide feedback through touch and partnering as well as verbally (Whitehouse, Adler, Chodorow, & Pallaro, 1999). Witnessing is a key element in Dance Exchange classes, and in dance making where, as a class or in pairs or groups, dancers act as witnesses to another's dance. It is a collaborative act; collaboration that entails responsibility and attention to the other, "allowing oneself to receive messages, to surrender weight into the floor, into your partner, the witnessing, the receiving, the sourcing, the creating and the sharing of ourselves" (Willard, 2013).

In dance education, relationships are central to the experience of children. Collaboration is part of the enjoyment and the value of the process. An exercise in which the whole group moved in the space and then attempted without any cues to pause and then to start moving again in unison, was used as part of warm-up for the performance at the end of the Dance Exchange summer institute. Such an exercise builds awareness and empathy among performers, a valuable skill in a group performance. I have used similar exercises with children to enhance empathy and their interpersonal awareness. Asking children to move together using the same movement image or idea such as "moving as if you are invisible" or imagining the space as something with varied properties that you can play with, encourages children to look at each other and share ideas, rather than a competitive atmosphere when "getting it right" is favoured. I have

found that asking children what they notice, or think or wonder about each other's dance can elicit more genuine and positive responses than asking them to critique or comment. Modeling the language of appreciation empowers children to give such responses. I did not instruct them in the use of this language explicitly or in a didactic way. Rather, it was a continual part of the conversation, about what we were doing. As I moved around the class, I observed, interacted, and thought aloud, about what I was seeing to help students clarify and develop their own ideas. In one class, children were asked to name moments that stood out for them after viewing each other's short dance sequences. This came at the end of the second lesson in a sequence of four:

This request elicited interesting responses including from one child who noticed the "signature movement when they spiraled their arms and then their whole bodies." This kind of keen observation acts as positive feedback to the other group and reinforces the child's pride in their own developing understanding.

Generalist teachers may be concerned that as they are not dancers themselves they are unable to teach dance (Buck, 2005). The tools and processes of Dance Exchange would be a wonderful starting point for teachers. They resemble in some ways games and activities they may have experienced or used in teaching, in particular, strategies that help teachers structure cooperative learning such as jigsaw, think-pair-share, and expert groups (Bellanca & Fogarty, 1991). The frames, provocations, and scores are meant to be used and explored in use. It is through use that they could become a part of the repertoire of a teacher (Dance Exchange, 2015c). The Dance Exchange tools are flexible such that teachers would be able to use their own personal practical knowledge of teaching and understanding of their students in order to work with and adapt the tools.

In the tool "equivalents," each word in a text is assigned a corresponding movement. The tool could be used as a whole class activity where all students around the circle offer their equivalent, followed by students in small groups combining selected movement choices to make movement sentences. Alternatively selected movements could be combined as a whole class dance. In my experience, children enjoy the freedom of the many options for interpreting a word, including: literally, as a pun, associatively, sound or shape-based or arbitrary ways and show interest in and an appreciation of the variety of responses from their peers. The repetition of some or all responses could extend students' understanding of the movement elements and the ways in which movements can be extended and elaborated, for example, by repeating a gesture at different levels, or speeds or by exaggerating it. I have used this tool in classrooms when developing dance sequences to interpret poetry. There are no wrong answers in this activity. The explicit nature of the process acts as a scaffold; this gives both

students and teacher confidence to explore and create, when they aren't expected to model a dance style or teach choreography. The process of copying and repeating all the variations also develops attention, movement memory, and a shared movement vocabulary they can draw on.

In the classroom, the process of dance is mostly a collaborative activity (Bresler, 2004; Buck, 2003). In the social constructivist classroom as envisioned by Vygotsky, the interaction between adult and child is like a dance (Berk & Winsler, 1995). In the dance classroom, this interaction is stripped back to its essence without the props and ephemera of chairs, tables, whiteboards, or electronic gadgetry, which even for the committed constructivist could be confronting. Yet, where teachers had the opportunity to co-construct dance with their students, they believed creative problem solving, which is an important component of all dance curricula, was the key to its value in the classroom (Buck, 2005).

Research in the U.S. has demonstrated that a hands-off approach to creative dance education can empower students in the middle years to collaboratively create dance to communicate an intended meaning (Giguere, 2011). Teachers in primary schools in Australia, faced with the imperatives of curriculum and reporting, may feel more secure with the support of teaching materials such as the Dance Exchange toolkit, which would help them scaffold teaching and learning, and a framework or model as a basis for including dance education in their classrooms. The Dance Exchange tools are not prescriptive but offer open-ended challenges, a figurative "container" for the ideas they inspire. The choreographic or dance-making tools of Dance Exchange are like the best cake recipe, endlessly adaptable no matter what movement ingredients you use. They can be followed very literally or modified and varied as teachers gain more confidence. They might provide a bridge for the unsure, or the teacher new to dance, to begin co-constructing dance with their students; helping them develop their own movement ideas, rather than teach pre-ordained steps.

The Dance Exchange model is not relevant to a practical skills approach often used in schools because it appears to be less demanding on teachers (Fraser et al., 2007). This may have potential instrumental value, such as keeping students busy, increasing their fitness, producing a performance for the entertainment of parents or the rest of the school, and reinforcing social skills. However, teachers may not have access to the requisite professional development or have the training to deliver dance skills and repertoire. The Dance Exchange model is based on a pedagogy that informs and supports more productive, interesting, and user-friendly ways to engage young children in dance in a classroom setting. "Doing it, making the mistakes, reflecting and

learning what works for you, is more important than learning more content knowledge” (Buck, 2009, p. 3).

The Dance Exchange model, with its emphasis on trust, witnessing, collaboration, and communication of meaning and a set of tools that are generously offered might be a source of empowerment for teachers. In schools, all children should get to dance, not just those deemed “gifted and talented.” Moreover, students should be able to communicate their ideas, feelings and stories through dance that is about something. Dance should occur in schools so that all students can experience it. This is important because all children have bodies and should have the opportunity to learn in and through movement in a collaborative, expressive, and non-competitive environment.

Creative learning needs to be “experienced” through active involvement, and enhanced by collaborative reflective processes (Resnick, 1987; Schön, 1987; Upitis et al., 1999). Teachers need to be involved as learners, so that they can experience the process of art making as their students do. This experience will also help them to appreciate the expressive and creative products of children. “Unlike traditional school-based approaches” and the individualistic and competitive nature of much of the learning taking place in schools, “community arts initiatives may naturally foster social capital by emphasizing the value of collaboration, the respecting and valuing of diversity, extending networks, and prioritizing the sharing of cognitive, emotional, social and physical resources” (Buys & Miller, 2009, pp. 3–4). Practical professional development, that is based on participatory, inclusive art making such as that of the Dance Exchange Summer Institute, is a reminder that the embodied experience of making dance is what is most important in dance education, for teachers and students alike.

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Reflecting Selves: Pre-Service Teacher Identity Development Explored Through Material Culture

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ABSTRACT

This article describes a research project that investigated the development of pre-service teacher identity, with an emphasis on meaning-making and articulation of personal values. The methodology is primarily arts-based. Data for the research consisted of: (1) participant-created three-dimensional constructions that symbolized their emerging values and identities; (2) accompanying written reflections that provided the context of the constructions and elaborated on the personal symbolization of the material culture involved. With this article, we hope to initiate further conversations around teacher education, professional development, and arts-based learning, with particular attention to dialogue about the teaching self.

In this article, we explore avenues to pre-service teacher (hereafter referred to as PST) self-identity, and argue that self-identity represents an essential component of teacher preparation, and eventually, in-service practice. We suggest that identity work requires attention to the development of positive self-identity, which is tied to notions of caring—for one's self and for one's students. As Noddings (1992) has argued, it seems reasonable to suggest that students need to feel valued by their teachers in order to feel self-worth in regard to their studies. The act of valuing, on the part of teachers, requires that they know their students as individuals, beyond ranks and standardized test scores. But a first step towards knowing and valuing others is having a positive self-identity. As Parker Palmer (1998) has insisted:

When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unexamined life—and when I cannot

see them clearly I cannot teach them well. When I do not know myself, I cannot know my subject—not at the deepest levels of embodied, personal meaning. (p. 2)

To that end, we endeavour to guide our students through their personal inquiries into Parker Palmer's question: *Who is the self that teaches?* (p. 4). Thus, as part of a two-year federal research grant that includes partners from two other Canadian universities, our study examines those inquiries. Our strategy is to encourage creative, material culture-based self-expression to enable student reflections upon and articulation of their evolving self-identities. In this paper we cover the results of the first phase of our ongoing research. This article thus focuses on the work of one McGill University undergraduate PST and her attempts at a creative (art-making) response to an articulation of her self-identity. We describe this in detail later in the article.

First, however, readers may find a little more context helpful. *Philosophical Foundations of Education* is the title of a required course in a four-year B.Ed. program within the Faculty of Education where we teach. Most students take the course in their first year of studies. One goal of the course is to introduce students to a variety of philosophical stances in regard to education. Thus students are introduced to readings by authors as varied as Plato, A. S. Neill, Martha Nussbaum, John Dewey, Nel Noddings, Neil Postman, and many others. The point of the readings is to show that there is more than one stance that one may take in regard to an educational philosophy. Students are invited to reflect on the degree to which they agree or disagree with the authors discussed, and to gradually adopt a position of their own. Most students construct a position based on the ideas of a few authors rather than on the work of any single philosopher. Their positions reflect their underlying values. But those values are not formed on the basis of readings alone. Indeed, students' daily lives, their interactions with the material world around them, are highly influential in the construction of values. The extent of those influences is not always recognized. One component of our teaching, and the specific focus of our research project, therefore, is to draw attention to the influences of material culture in the formation of teacher identities. Later in this paper we discuss our strategy in one class for highlighting that influence. In short, this paper addresses the theme of this issue—professional development in education—through discussion of what we hope readers will see as an innovative class assignment and its potential for expanding the boundaries of possibility.

Theoretical Framework

The role of material culture as formative in the development of pre-service teacher identities offers a site of new epistemological understandings in teacher education. Material culture provides: (1) concrete artefacts available for empirical examination; (2) a reference point for symbolic interpretation; and (3) a lens through which to deconstruct the sometimes problematic, frequently unarticulated and even inchoate nature of student-teacher perceptions in ways that define the conditions, practices, and products of what constitutes becoming a teacher in the 21st century.

Material culture is pervasive, an omnipresent feature of our daily lives. We build on Freedman's (2003) emphasis on visual culture as a cornerstone of teacher identity:

[T]he expanding realm of visual culture is not just worthy of study because *it's out there*; it is worthy of study because *it's in here*; through art making and viewing, we shape our thinking about the world and about ourselves. (p. 91, author's emphasis)

Freedman's (2003) extensive work on visual culture provides support for our focus on concrete representations of identity: "A good illustration of the complex connection between image and meaning can be seen in the visual choices people make to reveal cultural identities" (p. 97). Interesting in Freedman's (2003) statement is the focus on decision-making (i.e., the act of *choosing* a material, a theme, even one colour over another, indicates preferences). These inclinations derive from our lived experiences and individual backgrounds. Thus, one's values may find expression through creative work. We endorse Madhubiti's (2014) declaration that art "is not an afterthought but a destination of the mind" (p. x). As such, Weber and Mitchell (1995) echo Madhubiti's thought:

By using popular culture itself as a conduit for self-study, it is possible to stir up the sediment of subconscious images that colours intellectual and affective life, bringing to light previously hidden aspects of popular imagery that silently shaped personal and collective conceptions of teacher. (p. 131)

While we agree with the notion of art as a mindful destination and popular culture's possible contributions to that destination, we focus on conscious awareness, however sedimented that consciousness may be. That is, our analysis of the data takes a phenomenological turn to uncover layers of "the self that teaches" (Palmer, 1998, p. 4): religious and political beliefs, community affiliations, personal tastes,

memories, reflections, and so forth. Personal identity lies at the intersections of these phenomena. Examples of such intersections are reflected in our practice as educators when we use artefacts that have triggered our own values awareness and provided instructional insights (e.g., an excerpt from a thought-provoking movie to introduce ethical choices, a sculpture crafted by a member of an Inuit community to talk about cultural representations). When we adopt such practices, we aim to teach through our experiences, through who we are, through our values. This premise serves as a starting point for our inquiry into how the participants reflect on their identity through material constructions crafted with objects they value. That is, the PSTs see their values and beliefs embodied in the objects that mirror aspects of their teacher identities.

In making use of arts-based strategies to initiate creation of the data, our study complements others. For example, in a recent *LEARNing Landscapes* article, Gulla (2014) examines the processes inherent in poetic writing, with the objective of raising awareness as to how it might shape reflections on personal values and teacher identity. Other relevant studies (Ayers, 2010; Bukor, 2011, 2013; Conle, 2006; Ferrero, 2005; Knowles, Cole, & Presswood, 1994; Palmer, 1998) focus more generally on the need to enhance educators' reflectiveness on their practice as teachers.

We not only examine how arts practices and products contribute to emerging understandings of self as a PST, but also: (1) how creativity informs pedagogical practices (Crowell & Reid-Marr, 2013; Greene, 1991, 1995; Keller-Mathers, 2011; Robinson, 2006); (2) how visual art-making and creative writing provide a way to interrogate situated knowledge in relation to classroom experiences; and (3) how PST-created artefacts can be utilized to question meta-narratives that shape understandings of teacher identity development.

While some studies address the ongoing tensions between teachers' professional and personal selves (Palmer, 1998; Sameshima, 2007), there seems to be an overall agreement that identity work offers the possibility to bolster professional development and the intertwining of lived experiences and personal-professional relations (Cole & Knowles, 2000). As Stenberg (2010) explains: "In order to guarantee high-quality teaching, a teacher should be aware of the sources for making pedagogical decisions; the more aware teachers are, the more they can move beyond reactionary teaching behaviour towards conscious and rational decision-making processes" (p. 331). Our aim is to advance that awareness through the fostering of PST-created three-dimensional works and accompanying writings. To do so, we borrow from Connelly and Clandinin's (1988) notion of "personal practical knowledge," which is "a moral, affective, and aesthetic way of knowing one's life educational situations" (p. 59).

In their model, the authors emphasize the importance of picturing—as a reflective tool—personal writings that cater to aspects of autobiography, and journal writing, to enhance pre-service teachers’ ability to make sense of their purpose as teachers. Following Connelly and Clandinin’s theory of personal practical knowledge, the tools we used in our inquiry address images, personal philosophy, metaphors, practical principles, and morals (Clandinin & Connelly, 1986). The decisions teachers make ultimately depend on their personal practical knowledge, for it “exists in the teacher’s past experience, in the teacher’s present mind and body, in the future plans and actions” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1987, p. 496). Any decision is thus conditioned by the individual’s background, situatedness, and place in time.

Self-Identity and Values

In his chapter *The Heart of a Teacher: Identity and Integrity in Teaching*, Palmer (1998) contends that teachers fail to become “good” the very moment they—consciously or unconsciously—separate their personal from their teaching selves. He explains that robotic teaching results from disregarding one’s values and preferences in an effort to decrease one’s vulnerability in the classroom. As a solution, Palmer suggests self-identity development through *remembrance* of our values, but also of the persons that shaped (and continue to shape) us into who we are, that is, our mentors and our students. This understanding unravels the transmission of values in three stages: (1) the transfer starts in pre-service teaching, when the mentors communicate values that teacher candidates either receive or reject; (2) it continues when those teachers working in the field transform these values into knowledge to be transmitted; and (3) it flourishes through language when teachers share the necessary knowledge, actions, and values with their students. Pre-service teachers can only learn to do this when they start to familiarize themselves with who they are, what they like and dislike, and when they reflect on that practice: “As we learn more about who we are, we can learn techniques that reveal rather than conceal the personhood from which good teaching comes” (Palmer, 1998, p. 24). Similarly, Dolloff (1999) demonstrates that, when pre-service music teachers produce written narratives that accompany visual metaphors of teacher identity, these artful expressions give them an opportunity to recollect memories about their past teaching mentors who, in turn, contributed to shape parts of their identity.

Another study conducted by Blaikie (2009) concurrently shows that visual and written representations of the mind and body are negotiated expressions of a variety of values, including but not limited to: gender, culture, religion, socio-political tendencies, and sexual orientation. In the process of being aware of self, art-making

allows for various ways of investigating layers of the self, dimensions that are worthy of attention, but often difficult to grasp. Thus, through the creation of different art forms (e.g., drawings, poems, paintings, sculptures), or what Knowles, Cole, and Presswood (1994) call “artefacts of experience” (p. 23), such self-inquiries become possible.

Self-inquiry also addresses the capacity to make decisions that are, in turn, infused with embedded values. Often, teachers make decisions within clear dichotomous educational contexts: “Teaching ... involves preference and value, obligation and choice, trust and care, commitment and justification” (Ayers, 2010, p. 32). The task remains difficult, as Ayers (2010) explains: “A generative challenge in teaching is to decide who *you* want to be as a teacher, what *you* care about and what *you* value” (p. 36, our emphasis). Our project is one way to address these questions.

Attention to individual and collective values is crucial, not only in this study, but to indicate more broadly how teachers make sense of moral values that ought to be present in the profession. Made daily, moral decisions determine the actions teachers undertake on behalf of their students and for themselves. Ideally, conversations and discussions about values would lead to reflections that could ultimately improve some aspects of the schooling system:

We need to talk of values—of what ought to be—if we are ever to really understand ourselves, our situations, and our options, and if we are ever to undertake meaningful action toward improvement in schools or in society. (Ayers, 2010, pp. 36–37)

Modus Operandi

To assist our students in addressing the values embedded in their self-identities, we employed two strategies: 1) participant-made constructions of what we have called “identity boxes,” which are three-dimensional constructions made from found materials, and 2) accompanying commentary that detailed the thoughts and feelings behind their work. Participants, few of whom have any art background, assembled their constructions, including various compartments into which they placed items that symbolize facets of their evolving identities. The boxes provide a concrete object for personal and shared reflections. To address our second strategy, most students employed standard essay writing. Others attempted more poetic interpretations such as ekphrasis (i.e., “an elaboration upon the viewer’s experience and a creative endeavour in its own right” [White, 2013, p. 110]). The latter tends to emphasize the affective nature of the encounter (Moorman, 2006; Mansoor, 2014).

Specifically, in the fall term of 2014, as part of the course described earlier, we offered as an option for a final assignment the creation of individual three-dimensional objects that participants felt symbolized their teacher identity. Below is a description of the option:

Option D. *In our first class I introduced the idea of constructing “identity boxes.” As you saw, these can take an infinite variety of 3-D forms, so I invite you to use your creativity; there is no formula. However, your identity box should provide as clear a portrait of you as possible. By portrait, I don’t mean photograph. I mean what symbols (religious, ethnic, pop culture, job logo, etc.) can you use to describe various aspects of yourself? Your box can also contain papers you have written for this course or others, or just snippets of those papers. Find a little compartment to slide those into. Do you do any creative writing, not course related? If so, that’s an important part of your identity. Are there elements of your identity that you want to express but are not yet ready to share? If so, put a little lock on that part. Provide a one-page (at least) accompanying written document to assist in the interpretation of your 3D work. There are no size limitations to your construction; you (and I) just have to be able to lift it. I will photograph your work and return it to you.*

As the above option description indicates, we told the students during their first class their options for the final assignment. We showed numerous examples of three-dimensional works, from art students, professional sculptors, to architects (e.g., Habitat 67), and notably, creations by non-artist gay seniors who were exploring their memories of self-identity. These last were, in fact, the inspiration for the course option, and memories certainly played a role in our students’ works too. Students had the whole term to work on their constructions. Less adventurous students interpreted the word “box” very literally, thus limiting their explorations of possible forms. Others, however, interpreted the instructions widely, which is what we had hoped to see. Indeed, one student said that she deliberately tried to operate “outside the box.” The varied responses to the option created an assessment challenge. On what bases were we going to assign a grade? How indicative of the PSTs’ self-identities were the constructions? To address such questions, we used a mixture of “portraiture” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997), ethnography (Anderson, 1989; LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993; Pink, 2002), arts-based and arts-informed methodology (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Through these perspectives we studied “how material forms and visual images are central to the socialization of human beings into [education] culture” (University College London, segment on material culture, p. 1). That is, we investigated the belief systems, behaviours, and perceptions of our student participants through their created artefacts (Purcell, 1983; Schlereth, 1982).

To build their boxes, some students chose shoeboxes and the like, popular and convenient materials. Others used alternative pre-made forms (e.g., wood or plastic frames, luggage pieces, small bookshelves, even stools) as containers for their statements. Still others made their works from raw materials such as clay. In some cases the choice of materials and specific content was obvious. In other cases we needed the PST's input on the context and content—the commentary part of the exercise—to understand the work. We were flexible about the format of these written reflections. Consequently, the results point to a range of genres. Some used standard expository statements. Others explored poetic responses.

Each participant scheduled a 20-minute individual meeting with us in our Faculty of Education library, where we had designed and set up a photography booth. The objective of this session was primarily to give all PSTs the opportunity to showcase their piece and have pictures taken of the created work. We took several photographs of each artefact, from different angles and varied emphases. The photographs, written commentary, and in-person discussions formed the data for our inquiry. Approximately half the class of 120 students chose Option D. Due to word limits we cannot address all of those efforts here.

Below, we present the work of one PST, a typical example of a participant-generated identity box.

Exemplifications



Fig. 1: Outside the box—Megan's artefact

We will call our participant Megan. Her identity box took the form of a beige and burgundy suitcase (Figure 1), made from cardboard and scrapbook sheets. Three visual conventions or signs allow us, from a denotation perspective (Barthes, 1967, 1977) to interpret her box as a piece of luggage: 1) the handle implies that the box can be carried; 2) the tag (blurred for anonymity reasons) shows the participant's name and her return address; and 3) the maroon corners and vertical straps remind us of the suitcases of the mid-20th century. Megan describes her box as such:

I wanted to see how creative I could get with using a large shoebox as my base... I create[d] a vintage suitcase because I'd like to think my life is an adventure and the elements in this suitcase are what I have kept closest to me during this journey thus far.

The meaning of the image is literal in this case (i.e., Megan chose to build a suitcase). Her accompanying commentary confirms that she chose what she felt to be relevant elements to convey her message—"life as an adventure"—and aid in her reflections. Her message is both explicit and implied (Barthes, 1967, 1977). Her thoughts on identity guide her choices of material and form.

Inside her identity box, Megan chose explicit, denotative terms to express parts of her desires towards identity as teacher: "Around the top of my box I incorporated the three words: live, laugh, and love. These three words summarize what I would like my life to consist of" (Figure 2). Another explicit word, central in her construction, is *travel*: "I love being in a new place and soaking up as much culture and knowledge I can while visiting."



Fig. 2: Inside the box—Top cover of Megan's artefact

Using bold, capitalized, and colourful letters, Megan intertwines these four terms—live, love, laugh, travel—as central in this top cover. We note that the use of images in this frame is scarce. Instead, Megan used words that might be considered as directives, or a mandate, and a central map that suggests an emphasis, when placed below “TRAVEL!” The term “travel” might refer here to the destination rather than the action of travelling exemplified by the map. In other words, the visual supports countries and cities, rather than the means of travel (i.e., a destination, and the experiences that these trips bring).



Fig. 3: Multilayered aspects: A box within a box

In her reflections, Megan speaks to the various elements she incorporated in her frame. Visible in Figure 3 is an apple green, magenta, and sky blue box. Megan called this “The Center of my Universe,” in which she incorporated the pictures of influential mentors and persons. Within the box, she wrote adjectives that “best describe [her] character: relaxed, creative, warm, optimistic, passionate, loyal, dreamer, elegant, and caring.”

We see, in Megan’s identity construction, that she relies on words, but also visual images, and objects that signify her *being* as a PST. Megan also explains that the film *The Breakfast Club* sparked her interest in writing poetry for this project. In this case, Megan writes that a scene in the movie (as shown in a letter to the teacher, Figure 4) prompted her to give poetry a try.

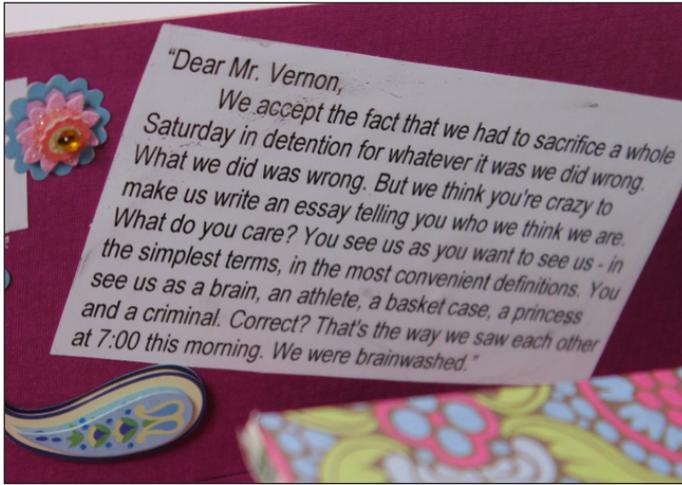


Fig. 4: Letter to the teacher from the film *The Breakfast Club* (Tanen, Hughes, & Hughes, 1985)

This quote is what inspired me to write my poem for this identity box. The reason ... I love it so much is that, as a teacher, I want to make sure to never judge my students according to what I think they are. I want my students to be able to define themselves. I want them to feel safe enough to show me who they truly are.

Megan's Accompanying Poetry

*I can spend my life trying to figure out who I am,
I am fixated on the idea
Shouldn't I already be someone?
This box is not me
It is merely a box filled with objects
Things that I keep closest to heart
They do not define me
They contribute to 'I'
The 'I' that I am creating
The 'I' of today
Is not the 'I' of yesterday,
Nor will it be the 'I' of tomorrow*

A Brief Commentary on Megan’s Poetry

Megan’s poem suggests that she is aware of her current self—“shouldn’t I already be someone?” At the same time, she acknowledges in her first line that her “self” is an ongoing project. Her question, however, hints at a certain resistance to the idea that her current identity may not be enough, although the final lines acknowledge the inevitable changes. Megan is also well aware that the suitcase is not “her.” It is “merely a box.” But she is also aware that symbols have the power to represent her. They contribute to “I.”

An initial examination of Megan’s self-identity, as portrayed in her “suitcase” and her accompanying commentary, shows certain affinities and values that we portrayed diagrammatically:

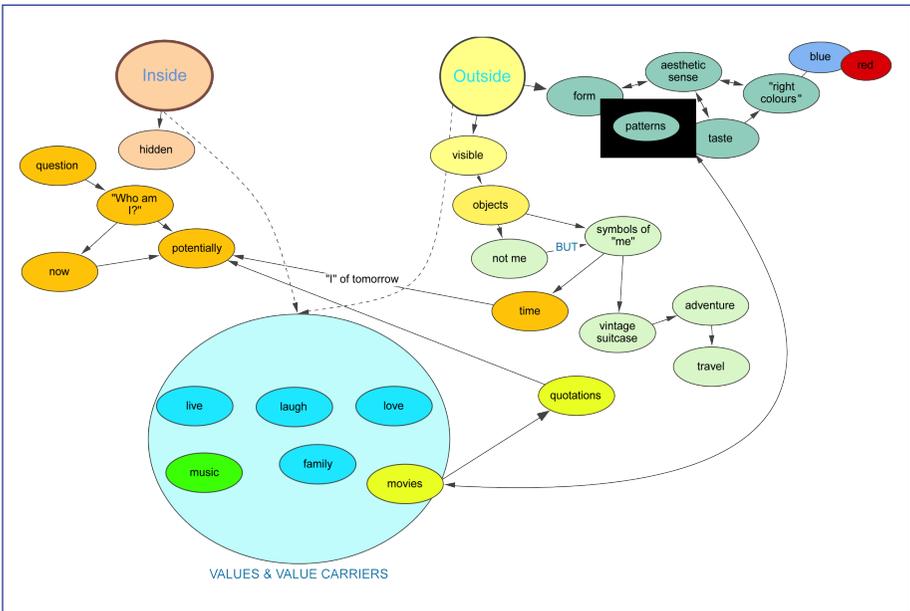


Fig. 5: A diagram situating Megan’s values and identity work

The diagram is a complement to what we provided above on Megan’s poetic self-explorations and examines further Megan’s own written commentary on her suitcase. What we hope the diagram makes clear are the contributions to a few of her values, both “inside” and “outside” manifestations. No doubt Megan has many other values that are not represented here. For example, we do not know whether she has the patience that a teacher should have. Megan did not address that quality. However, what she did mention explicitly shows up as core values. The diagram refers to qualitative responses

to features of Megan's life. That is, movies, family, or music, are not the values, but her responses to them are. Those three items are the carriers of values. We can see or hear those phenomena. Similarly, laughter is a phenomenon that we can hear, but the directive to laugh is a qualitative stance, a way of greeting the world. Even the word "live" has an implied directive, rather than being a specific concrete object. Whereas, we cannot "see" love, love is embedded in certain actions that we interpret as that quality.

Educational Significance

In this paper we have tried to demonstrate one pathway, through attention to arts-based participant-created artefacts, to PST self-identities. Our study, we hope, has the potential to demonstrate the viability and practicality of incorporating the arts more centrally in teacher education programs. That is, arts-based assignments can be used as teaching tools within the teaching profession, and integrated into teacher education research. Increased understanding of connections between arts-informed self-definition and successful, satisfying teaching practice may enable pre-service education programs, education ministries, curriculum designers, and school boards to adopt strategies to address current rates of new-teacher attrition. Benefits to non-researchers, such as classroom teachers and educational policy makers, rest in the model we provide for a focus on the arts across the curriculum as a way to engage students in embodied, holistic learning.

Concluding Remarks

An objective of this paper has been to contribute to the ongoing dialogue in teacher education regarding ways to deepen teacher candidates' understanding of their values and self-identities. In so doing, we acknowledge the limitations of our study. As Palmer (1998) notes: "identity... can never be fully named or known by anyone, including the person who bears [it]" (pp. 13–14). Nonetheless, we hope that we have demonstrated that creative and artful constructions of identity open certain windows into pre-service teachers' selves, albeit with an example from only one student.

We have defended the need for an arts-based contribution to professional development as it acknowledges PSTs' actual material culture and world they live in. We started by reviewing and acknowledging the ongoing contributions of visual representations of teacher identity. In a section on self-identity and values, we noted that decision-making is part of identity construction, and that through material choices in constructing identity boxes, PSTs can further reflect on who is the "self that teaches" (Palmer, 1998). With Megan's example, we showed that one can discern moments that

influenced her as a PST, and terms that capture her evolving sense of self. Her popular culture references to movies such as *The Breakfast Club* were helpful in that discovery. The quotation she chose from that movie speaks to a representation of the pedagogical dynamics that were influential to her teacher identity. This discovery echoes Weber and Mitchell's (1995) statement on the role of popular culture in that endeavour: "How people think about teaching may be shaped in many ways by the images of teacher in popular culture that they encounter in their daily lives" (p. 20). Our task in this paper has been to draw attention to the various ways pre-service teachers make sense of that role through visual representations of themselves and the material representations they value.

Most teachers today use popular culture in their classrooms. In a popular culture-infused world, attention is drawn to what meets the eye and shapes the lenses through which we see ourselves, others, and the world we live in. Our hope is that this lens can be adjusted through reflections on the self, not only in written form, but also supported with visual and kinesthetic constructions designed to capture the multiple layers of individual identities. The implications of our study are that attention to material and popular culture can be a beneficial and freeing means to learning. We have argued that teachers need to be aware of their teaching selves, their choices, and preferences that inform their pedagogical practice (Ayers & Ayers, 2014), and that professional development can benefit from such artful inquiries into the self. For, identity work lies at the crossroads of experiences, choices, and events. With a deeper look into "artifacts of experience" (Cole, Knowles, & Presswood, 1994, p. 23), we suggest in this study that, when PSTs are given the directive and opportunity to explore and symbolize their self-identities, creative artful inquiry can provide one avenue towards that articulation. What we have described here is based on an initial experiment in one class. In future we might want to augment the exercise with initial small-group conversations about the underlying tensions and positive messages of identity work as a base for professional development. Students could also hold critiques of peers' works in progress, encouraging increased attention to the relation between form and content as they grapple with the intricacies of meaning-making in regard to the "self that teaches."

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“Cause It Has to Happen”: Exploring Teachers’ Resistance to LGBT Literature and Issues in a Teacher Inquiry Group

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores teachers’ resistance to LGBT literature and issues by examining how a group of teachers, as part of a social justice research project, responded to an article that examined reasons why teachers who hold anti-homophobic views still resist teaching LGBT texts and topics in their classrooms. Boler and Zembylas’s (2002) notion of a “pedagogy of discomfort” provides a framework for understanding reluctance to move out of one’s comfort zone. The story of how one of the research participants pushed the boundaries of possibility by undertaking subsequent professional development initiatives at her school offers an alternative to teacher resistance.

Lynne’s Story

In the winter of 2013, an article in the journal *Language Arts* caught my attention: *Teachers’ Resistance to LGBT Literature and Issues* (Haertling Thein, 2013).¹ Four decades ago, when I took a children’s literature course during my education degree, I could not have imagined that LGBT literature would be available for teachers to use with their students, or that there would be articles about this topic in professional education journals. That I would one day challenge my own undergraduate students’ discussion of stereotypes in the picture book, *Mom and Mum get Married* (Settingington, 2004), with a personal anecdote from my own same-sex wedding would have seemed a fairy tale. Although times have changed, I am not surprised by the suggestion that teachers remain resistant to LGBT literature and issues. I am troubled, though. The title of

Smolkin and Young's (2011) article, *Missing Mirrors, Missing Windows: Children's Literature Textbooks and LGBT Topics*, captures my concern. The authors make the point that:

all children deserve to have access to books in schools that are reflective of their cultures. Such books are seen as self-affirming mirrors for children of a given culture and as windows into other lives for children outside that given culture. Both are important factors in developing empathy and understanding in cross-cultural interactions. (p. 217)

In their article, Smolkin and Young acknowledge the progress we have made since "Larrick's (1965) all white world of children's books" (p. 217), at the same time pointing out that LGBT children or children of LGBT families seldom have their lives "mirrored in the books they find in schools" (p. 217). I can appreciate the authors' comments. When I began my teaching career in small Aboriginal communities more than 30 years ago, it was difficult for Aboriginal students to see themselves represented in the books they read at school; students from various ethnocultural backgrounds faced a similar situation (Wiltse, 2015). Fortunately, there has been an upsurge in texts authored by immigrant and first generation Canadians, as well as increased publication of children's literature by authors of Aboriginal heritage. Teachers are now better able to consider cultural diversity in relation to text selection, so that students can recognize themselves in the texts they are offered at school. Although limited in comparison, there is also a growing collection of books for children and youth that deal with LGBT topics. As the titles of both Haertling Thein's and Smolkin and Young's articles suggest, these books are rarely making their way into classrooms.

Although both papers speak to the American situation, parallels can be made to the Canadian context. Over the last several years, I have introduced a wide selection of diverse literature to pre-service and in-service teachers in my language and literacy and children's literature courses as well as in research projects. My students and research participants have used many of these books (and others) in their teaching to address various social justice issues, ranging from residential schooling and contemporary Aboriginal issues to historical and current topics of war. In contrast, the uptake on the LGBT books has been minimal, with one notable exception. The exception was Erica,² one of my students in a small teacher education program in the interior of British Columbia, and a research participant in a national study that placed Canadian multicultural picture books in the hands of pre-service teachers.³

During her field experience in a primary classroom, Erica was asked to teach a unit about families. In an attempt to be inclusive, she selected a wide array of books

about different kinds of families, and chose *Asha’s Mums* (Elwin & Paulse, 1990), one of the picture books in the research study collection, to represent children who may have same-sex parents. *Asha’s Mums* tells the story of a young girl who must explain to her teacher and classmates that having two mums is not a problem because they are a family. When Erica provided her teacher mentor with an overview of the unit, she requested that Erica talk to the principal about her choice. In the following interview excerpt, Erica describes their conversation:

He had a problem with *Asha’s mums*. He went on the internet and pulled up the information based on what happened down in Surrey. He said this book was too controversial and asked me what was I trying to do in the classroom with this book. I told him I’m celebrating all kinds of different families as there’s a lot of variations of families now, including quite a few in that classroom. He said that he didn’t want a parent coming in and getting all upset about this sort of thing, and that if there’s a problem with having same sex parents at his school, he’d deal with it. I just thought, “Well, why wouldn’t you be proactive?”

Why not indeed? “What happened in Surrey” is that when James Chamberlain, a primary school teacher, requested permission from the Surrey School District to use *Asha’s Mums* and two other books that featured families with same-sex parents to reflect contemporary families, the board voted against the request. A legal battle that went all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada ensued; the court decreed that the school board could not impose its religious values by refusing to permit the use of books to promote tolerance of same-sex relationships (Chamberlain v. Surrey School District No. 36).⁴ As Erica had learned about the court case in our children’s literature course, she knew the Supreme Court’s decision prevented school boards from banning books based on their own views and that the ruling noted that families headed by same-sex parents need to be respected. But, as a pre-service teacher in a small school district in which she hoped to apply for a teaching position, Erica felt powerless, and removed the book from her unit.

Haertling Thein’s study (2013) rekindled my interest in this topic. The author found that even language arts teachers who held anti-homophobic views may “still resist teaching LGBT texts and issues in their classrooms” (p. 169). Anti-homophobic is how I would describe the teachers in my research study, *Engaging Teachers With Canadian Literature for Social Justice*. Project funds provided participating teachers with the opportunity to select a class set of contemporary Canadian-authored texts for their students to read. In monthly inquiry groups, the teachers examined the academic literature in the field, in addition to discussing pedagogical strategies for teaching their

selected books. In the hope that the Haertling Thein article would spark discussion, I asked the teachers to read the paper for our next meeting. The reading did generate thought-provoking conversation, and in the case of one of the research participants, Theresa, provided the impetus for further action. At the time, Theresa was curriculum coordinator at a local school, and a graduate student working on her Master's degree with a particular interest in the idea of transformative leadership and leading for social justice. The article facilitated Theresa's realization that LGBT literature and issues were areas for attention at her school; she became involved in professional development initiatives that pushed the boundaries of possibility. What ensued led to this article.

We will begin with a brief explanation of study details for the research project in which we were involved, followed by a summary of Haertling Thein's article that served as the catalyst for this paper. Next, select comments from the inquiry group conversation will be provided. Theresa will then offer an account of the professional development that she undertook at her school. In the follow-up discussion, we offer suggestions for decreasing teacher resistance to LGBT literature and issues.

Study Details for the Teacher Inquiry Group

Our inquiry group was part of a three-year national research study designed to explore possibilities for teaching contemporary Canadian literature for children and youth to promote issues of social justice in Grades 4 to 12 classrooms (our inquiry group was for Grades 4-6). The primary purpose of the teacher inquiry groups was for teachers to select and teach one or more texts, and to discuss pedagogical strategies for teaching these texts in ways that engage students to reflect on structural and social inequities in Canadian society.

In designing the theoretical framework of the study, we drew on contemporary theories of social justice that see teachers as agents of social change attending to issues of race, class, gender, and language (Cochran-Smith, 2004; McDonald, 2007) and studies that emphasize the role of literature in advocacy research in literacy education (Bender-Slack, 2010; Cherland & Harper; 2007; Wolk, 2009). In conceptualizing our inquiry group approach, the work of Wenger (1998) and Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009), who promote possibilities for individuals in communities to engage in inquiry around their own practice in an attempt to improve curriculum, pedagogy, and student outcomes, was utilized. As the study progressed, we also began to examine the ways in which study findings resonated with Boler and Zembylas's (2003) notion of a

“pedagogy of discomfort” that questions contemporary certainties shaped by dominant norms and highlights gaps and absences in current curricular practices.

Our inquiry group with 10 teachers was one of six sites in the national study, each constituting a descriptive case study. Together with our teacher participants, we followed an action research model of understanding a research problem, planning, acting, observing, reflecting, and reviewing (Carr & Kemmis, 1986), as participants worked through the curricular and pedagogical possibilities of teaching for social justice with Canadian literature. Data were collected from audio-recorded discussions in the teachers’ inquiry group, classroom observations of teaching, and subsequent curricular reflections in the inquiry group. At the time of the article discussion, we were in the second year of the study.

Summary of Haertling Thein’s Article

Haertling Thein’s study was designed to illuminate some of the reasons why language arts teachers may hold anti-homophobic views but still resist teaching LGBT texts and issues in their classrooms. The data were collected from the participants, 20 language arts teachers enrolled in an online master’s course on multicultural literature instruction at an American university (one week of the course focused on teaching LGBT issues and texts). In her paper, Haertling Thein challenges teachers to rethink their stances towards teaching LGBT texts and issues. To do so, she drew on Clark’s (2010) research, which distinguishes between anti-work, a stance limited to disrupting heterosexist discourses and homophobic language, and ally-work, a stance which necessitates critical conversation regarding heteronormativity and homophobia. While anti-work is carried out at the individual level, ally-work targets systemic or institutional change. Haertling Thein compares the seeming neutrality of an anti-stance to a “colour-blind” stance towards racism (see Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000). This framework helped her to make sense of the discrepancies between teachers’ beliefs towards LGBT literature and issues and their unwillingness to take on ally-work.

Haertling Thein’s (2013) analysis identified six prominent categories regarding participants’ unwillingness to teach LGBT texts: appropriateness; displaced negative stance; force of facts; reversal; fairness; and ability/preparedness (pp. 172-176). A brief description of each of the categories follows. The first category, termed **appropriateness** (*I would, but it’s not my job*), was the most common way participants justified their unwillingness to teach LGBT issues and texts. Some participants equated

this topic with sex which they believed did not belong in school or in the language arts classroom. Several participants argued that LGBT issues are important in schools, but the job lies with those in positions of greater power, not teachers. The second category, **displaced negative stance** (*I would, but others will protest*), proved to be another a common justification. For example, many teachers argued that their conservative communities or rigid parent population would not approve while others said they would be unable to teach LGBT texts as students would respond with homophobia/immaturity. Each of these qualifications was based on assumptions about the beliefs/attitudes of others. Teachers who fell within the next reason, **force of facts** (*I would, but the fact is...*), claimed teaching LGBT texts/issues was not possible as it posed a direct threat to one's career, was explicitly prohibited, or even constituted the teaching of illegal activities. Haertling Thein labeled the next category, **reversal** (*I would, but it will cause more harm than good*). Reversals were used to suggest that teaching LGBT issues and texts would cause more harm than good. For example, teaching or discussing such issues would evoke bullying by straight students and embarrassment of LGBT students. Participants acknowledged value in teaching LGBT issues/texts and would do so "in an ideal world." Similar to justifications based on reversals were those grounded in **fairness** (*I would, but it's not fair to everyone*). This defense claimed teaching LGBT issues and texts would be unfair as the topic discriminates against students and parents who hold anti-gay views; participants used their belief in equality and the rights of anti-gay students as justification for avoidance. The last category of resistance was **ability/preparedness** (*"I would but I don't know how"*). Some teachers pointed to their own deficits in attempting to teach LGBT texts and issues. Rather than being opposed, they felt ill-prepared or that they lacked an inherent ability for this kind of teaching.

“Cause it Has to Happen”: Participants’ Responses to Reading

On the whole, the research participants in our study were rather critical of the excuses made by the teachers in Haertling Thein’s article. Theresa began the conversation with a critique of a comment within the category, *I would, but it's not my job*:

There were a lot of things in this article that really got my blood going actually, but one spot in particular on page 172, when Callie, an elementary school teacher said, “I have no problem with homosexuality, I’m not homophobic, etc. I have friends, I support their gay rights and feel they should not be denied anything that straight couples receive. Yet I am wishy washy on whether or not I feel that schools should

show any support of any side of the issue.” But we do that, by all of the choices that we make. The stories we use, the language we use often.

Theresa felt strongly as to the inappropriateness of the appropriateness justification: “I don’t think that ‘not my job’ would be an argument, because I think we take care of kids emotionally and academically.” Another participant’s reasoning was similar:

I highlighted something by *It’s not part of their job*. When I read this line, it caused me to question whether teaching is your job at all...That is an immediate flag for me. This statement defines a teacher’s inability to think outside the box. Teaching in all its greyness is your job.

There was agreement on the part of the inquiry group that Callie’s reasoning was not considered to be a valid reason for avoidance.

This led to a related point regarding the difference between the personal and the professional. Comments made by our participants suggested that they struggled to accept the lack of consistency shown by the teachers in the Haertling Klein article. For example, one teacher maintained:

If you get down to the root of it, teachers who aren’t comfortable teaching this topic, are not comfortable with this personally. I think any teacher who is truly comfortable with LGBTQ has no problem bringing it into the classroom.

Another teacher expressed a similar view, but in a converse way: “I think if you’re resisting the issue, there’s something on a personal level that’s resisting it.” Despite their assessment, there was acknowledgement that there may be certain factors to consider. One teacher noted: “It could be these other issues that the teachers brought up—fear of that parent coming in after school and tearing your head off.” Another participant added this for consideration: “And say you’re a fresh grad, in your first 5 years of teaching and the fear that goes with that.”

The significance of contextual factors corresponded to the displaced negative stance category. There was a general consensus amongst our research participants that *I would but others will protest* would be a common excuse. Theresa suggested that “I think *others protesting* would be a big one, and then I think that relates to *it’ll cause more harm than good*, kind of keeping everybody happy and don’t rock the boat.” Concern about rocking the boat was a theme with which some of the participants could

identify. For example, Thomas made the following comment about his current school, which was part of the public school district:

I would say it (LGBT issues) would be accepted. Looking back, though, when I started working for the Catholic district, it just wasn't something I would even consider. So, then, making the jump to the public district, I feel like I was more open to using LGBT topics. I think what held me back before was not being permanent and not wanting to rock the boat. But, now that I'm permanent, it's a different story.

As can be seen by Thomas's remark, there was the acknowledgment that circumstances such as the type of school/district in which teachers worked, as well as whether they had the security of a permanent contract played a role when it came to willingness to rock the boat—or not.

However, when it came to the reasons given by the teachers in Haertling Thein's study for the fairness argument (i.e., teaching LGBT issues and texts would discriminate against students and parents who hold anti-gay views), the participants in our study offered no such leeway. In this regard, they found Haertling Thein's comparison of colour-blind racism to an anti-stance towards homophobia instructive, as can be seen by the following:

At the end of that quote under fairness, it says that students need to know that their feelings and opinions are respected. Yeah, exactly why you need to approach it. And, comparing it to things like racism helps.

Being against LGBT issues is not a right. It's not that so and so's parents are racist, so we won't do a book about Black people because we need to respect their opinion. I find if you turn everything into a racist context, it makes you realize how silly it is... I don't think that some opinions should be respected. LGBTQ rights are human rights and we teach and respect human rights.

Well and that's just the thing. It's not an opinion—it's a human right.

The bottom line for the teachers in our study was that LGBT issues were a matter of human rights. Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2000) argue that we must "blow the whistle on color-blind racism" as it allows color-blind racists to "defend systemic White privilege" (p. 78). Similarly, we need to unmask views that support heterosexist and homophobic discourses.

The participants touched on the final justification provided in Haertling Thein’s article, that of ability/preparedness. For example, Theresa’s opinion was that, “I think another reason would be *I would, but I don’t know how*. I think that’s valid. I’m not saying it should be an excuse or a reason, but I can see teachers using it.” Another teacher expressed her viewpoint: “I think some people just use that as a cop out. That’s their safe way of avoiding, even though they’re probably a competent teacher. You can learn about the topic and teach it effectively.” Although there was some disagreement as to the validity of this reason, all the participants agreed with the observation that what matters is “if you’re open to learning it.” For teachers who are open to learning, Theresa speaks to what is needed:

I think what the author wrote on the very first page about the NCTE (National Council of Teachers of English) passing the resolution advocating for strengthening teacher knowledge of LGBT issues...is huge. It is partly awareness and partly knowing that you’ll be supported by the office if you choose to read the book and address these issues, ‘cause it *has* to happen.

“Cause it *has* to happen.” I could not help but notice the passion of Theresa’s assertion. While this inquiry group discussion proved to be one of our more animated, Theresa’s voice seemed to rise above the others in its fervour. I hoped that the article and follow-up dialogue would prompt some of the teachers to choose an LGBT text to read to their students. However, I had not anticipated the ways in which Haertling Thein’s article would provoke Theresa to push the boundaries of possibility regarding professional development. In the next section, Theresa will explain her story, how she went from her belief that it *has* to happen to *making* it happen.

Making It Happen: Theresa’s Story

The intensity of my emotional response to Haertling Thein’s article shocked me a bit. I found myself not only calling into question the excuses offered by the teachers in the article, but also, and perhaps more importantly, I immediately began reflecting on practices within our school context through which we may have been unwittingly marginalizing students who may be already marginalized.

Around the time we discussed this article, I was working towards attaining my Master’s degree in Educational Studies and was called upon to create a growth plan reflecting a style of leadership that addressed district-level principal quality standards

as well as personal and professional values. I decided on transformative leadership; leadership that challenges the status quo to ensure all students have equal access to school success (Shields, 2004). Examining current status quo for inequities is an important aspect of transformative leadership—leaders who empower staff and students to think critically about the “way things have always been done” are helping challenge Shields’ notion of “pathologizing the lived experiences of students” (p. 112) or the practice of referring to student differences as deficits. The teachers’ responses in Haertling Thein’s article elicited a powerful emotional reaction; the notion of explaining away LGBT issues in the classroom contrasted sharply with my commitment to transformative leadership, rooted in action, underpinned by empowerment.

Through the research group I learned that I was also experiencing and encouraging others (colleagues and students) to experience a “pedagogy of discomfort”; the opportunity to move outside our comfort zones and “draw attention to the ways in which we enact and embody dominant values and assumptions in our daily routines” (Boler & Zembylas, 2003, p. 111). When my commitment to transformative leadership intersected with my involvement with the research group, I moved from knowing something had to happen to taking action.

We began by exploring our choice of language. Seemingly innocuous words like “guys” were recognized as gender-exclusive and were quickly replaced with more intentional and inclusive language. We looked closely at the clubs we offered for our students and came to realize that although our intentions were honourable, we may have been doing more harm than good. In 2012 we created a boys’ club and a girls’ club to address peer-interaction issues that arose during unstructured recess times. Our goal was to teach our students pro-social skills—and enhance their social-emotional competencies. An unfortunate by-product was that our heteronormative paradigm placed some of our children in an uncomfortable position; do they choose to attend a group based on their sex assigned at birth or based on their gender identity? Further, the activities in each of these clubs were stereotypically feminine and masculine; the girls made crafts while the boys played team sports. Our actions spoke to the masculine and feminine gender norms at play in our school community. The day we came to this realization, we experienced intense discomfort. We pride ourselves on valuing every child and in this instance our actions did not reflect our beliefs. In response, we changed the name of the club to the “You Be You” club and all children were invited to attend. Staff and students worked together to explore personal uniqueness, strengths, interests, and challenges. This small change in language and purpose has helped us genuinely honour the diversity amongst our school community members and has prompted us to critically examine other routines and traditions.

My intense emotional reaction to Haertling Thein’s article was due in part to my recently becoming aware of our district’s Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) policy.⁵ When our research group engaged with this article, I was immediately struck by how our policy nullifies the arguments brought forward. No matter one’s personal perspective, or what excuses one has, creating a safe and caring environment for our LGBT children is not only a human rights issue, but also our professional responsibility. Our policy provides a supportive foundation for the work we do within our school—a safety net when confronted by staff, parents, or students about why we actively engage with LGBT issues. Part of the policy ensures each school has at least one staff member trained as a Safe Contact. The role of a Safe Contact is to engage and support gender minority and questioning students and their families so they feel safe, included, and respected while encouraging them to actively participate in and contribute to their schools and communities.

I attended Safe Contact training and participated in a powerful activity entitled, *Coming Out Stars Activity*. Through this activity, participants were invited to explore privilege and heterosexism and to reflect on their own behaviours and beliefs around sexuality. The instructor gave each participant a star, representing our worlds, and asked us to write the names of personally significant people in response to a variety of prompts. Once each point on the star contained a name, participants gathered in a large circle and the instructor gave instructions, such as: if your star is orange, your family member rejects you when you come out as LGBT and you are thrown out of your home and disowned. Participants were asked to tear off that point and let it fall to the floor.

As the activity continued, the empathy, compassion, and sadness in the room were palpable. Participants reflected emotionally on the toll our reactions and choice of words can take on others. This experience left me with intense feelings of both sadness and hope. My sadness came from a place of regret for those who have been silenced by others due to their difference. As Boler and Zembylas (2003) explain, “(d)ifference is produced not only through an explicit naming but also through the power of silence and absence” (p. 120). My sense of hope came from knowing I am part of a district that truly honours and works purposefully to include and celebrate all members of our school community.

Discussion and Pedagogical Implications

As we reflect on Theresa's professional development efforts, we ask ourselves what enabled Theresa to push the boundaries of possibility. We feel the answer, at least in part, relates to her comfort level with discomfort. And, although we wish it were not so, we acknowledge that Theresa is likely the exception in this regard. In this section, we explore what this means for educational practice and professional development.

By and large, the literature in the field confirms Haertling Thein's findings of teacher resistance to LGBT issues and literature. For example, Puchner and Klein's (2011) study of middle-school language arts teachers found that while all teacher participants "recognized that the topic of same-sex sexuality was important for their students,... the teachers used a variety of strategies to avoid or redirect discussion of the topic" (p. 233). Other studies report similar results (see for example, Clark, 2010; Hermann-Wilmarth, 2010, Larrabee & Morehead, 2010; Schneider & Dimito, 2008). Shifting societal expectations around LGBT issues creates challenges for teachers who are uncomfortable with this aspect of difference. Boler and Zembylas (2003) explain that views of difference reflect various emotional stances, for example, tolerance or denial. They argue that what is common to these "emotional stances is an unwillingness to engage the difficult work of (re)constructing one's own beliefs, values, and assumptions. There is understandable reluctance to encounter one's fears, and instead one may cling to particular safety zones" (p. 114). While we sympathize with the desire to stay within one's comfort zone, we do not accept teacher discomfort as a satisfactory justification for avoiding difficult issues in the classroom. How can teachers be encouraged to adopt a pedagogy of discomfort for the sake of their students? The implications of this question for practice take us back to Theresa's remark that what teachers, who are supportive but nonetheless resistant, need is a combination of awareness and support. This mixture can be seen in the following claim, made by Theresa during the inquiry group discussion:

Well personally I would read any of the books and I think I feel strong enough about why it's important that I can articulate that clearly enough for anybody who wanted to challenge it. So, I would feel comfortable doing it...I think others will protest would be a big one, but I know our principal's very supportive. She wants to order lots of the children's books on the challenged books list. SOGI issues, or LGBT, is very underrepresented in our library for sure.

The "under-representation and use of LGBTQ resources in classrooms and libraries" (p. 207) is highlighted in McNeil's (2010) chapter, *Everybody But Me: Social Justice and*

Literacy Learning. According to McNeil, the “inadequate response of school libraries to the resource/information needs of LGBT and queer students” (p. 189) is a Canadian social justice issue. This is but one of many ways that having a supportive administration is no small consideration when it comes to LGBT issues and literature.

While Theresa would have pushed the boundaries regardless of the type of support she received, she allows that her initiatives would not have been as successful without support, at both school and district levels. In terms of pushing boundaries, the support of the inquiry group, while helpful, was not crucial for Theresa. However, not all teachers are as fortunately positioned. A case in point is Kevin, one of the participants in our study; Kevin provides a striking contrast to Theresa, in both his awareness of and comfort with LGBT issues and literature. Unfortunately, Kevin missed the meeting when we were discussing the article. In the next meeting, the topic resurfaced as Theresa gave a SOGI update. Kevin admitted to the group that he did not know how to navigate the topic:

I had twins in my class last year, and they had two moms. I had no idea how to do this. I felt really kind of lost... Luckily, they were both reasonably good students, and pretty good kids too. But, the thing is, it was more my problem... because I was uneasy. I’m not against it, just I was uneasy.

As with the teachers in Haertling Thein’s study, Kevin could be described as anti-homophobic, but likewise resistant. Using Haertling Thein’s categories, the justification that best describes Kevin is ability/preparedness (“*I would but I don’t know how*”). Kevin’s feelings of not knowing how were likely aggravated by the reality that he taught at a traditional charter school.⁶ The charter school where Kevin taught was known for its academically oriented program, highly structured environment, and teacher-directed instruction. Kevin explained that LGBT issues were not discussed by his colleagues, nor was his school in the district with the SOGI Policy. Unlike Theresa, Kevin felt he had backing at neither level. Given this, the support of the inquiry group was particularly crucial if Kevin were to push boundaries, as can be seen by his explanation:

Well that’s the thing (not being covered by SOGI). At my charter school, we’re basically in a box and I’ve been in that particular box for a long time, and just to come here and to listen to you guys talking about this was informative, at times even humbling because these are things that I hadn’t even thought of approaching.

The inquiry group conversation increased Kevin’s awareness of the topic and of the available literature and resources. And, as the research project budget allowed for

purchase of resources, if Kevin had decided to teach one or more LGBT texts, the group would offer moral support as well as teaching suggestions. Such a choice could be of benefit, as can be seen by the following remark: “I would find myself saying things like, ‘Well, go and ask your mom about this.’ I wasn’t going to say, ‘Go and ask your moms.’ But, you know I was just awkward and I just didn’t know the language.”

Once again, our discussions could assist Kevin with his heteronormative language; and, had he known about the book, *Asha’s Mums*, he could have read it to his class as a first step. Fittingly, one of the challenges the main character in *Asha’s Mums* faces is to get her teacher to accept that she has two mums. Wouldn’t “Go and ask your moms” be more appropriate in Kevin’s situation (akin to “Go and ask your parents”)?

In our comparison of Kevin and Theresa’s differing circumstances, we return to the contrasting stances found in anti-work and ally-work. We value Clark’s (2010) critique of anti-work as neutral and apolitical, and agree with Clark and Haertling that anti-work is not enough. What Theresa has undertaken in her school provides a powerful exemplar of professional development in the form of ally-work. However, as educators, we certainly acknowledge the importance of an anti-stance towards LGBT issues. Teachers, like Kevin, who lack awareness and support, may not be ready for ally-work; in such cases, anti-work (confronting, rather than ignoring, students who use derogatory language, for example) is an important place to begin.

As Boler and Zembylas (2003) explain, the vulnerability that accompanies a pedagogy of discomfort “must apply as much to the educator as to the students” (p. 130). As a result of Theresa’s professional development initiatives, both educators and students at her school were “able to gain a new sense of interconnection with others and expand the borders of comfort zones” (p. 133). Our hope is that the professional development provided by the inquiry group will result in Kevin and his future students experiencing growth of this nature as well.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we return to Erica, the pre-service teacher whose plans to use a same-sex themed text were halted by an unsupportive school administrator. In the following interview excerpt, Erica describes the remainder of her conversation with the principal, and its effect on her thoughts about her future career as a teacher:

As he requested, I did not use the book and that was the end of the issue—there it was, swept under the rug. I was upset about it. I felt that he was really closed minded, suggesting that this kind of school isn’t ready for a book like this... And, I was frustrated by the power differential of being just a student teacher. It made me think about what the future might hold for me. What if I encounter this situation again, only this time I am a paid person on someone’s staff? Am I willing to go to bat for this cause? Am I willing to be the teacher that takes this the distance?

Given what may be at stake, especially for beginning teachers, these are questions with no easy answers. If the participants in Haertling Thein’s study are any indication, there may be a shortage of teachers prepared to take on this cause, and no wonder, if Erica’s experience is common. However, we like to think that Theresa’s story is more representative of the changing times regarding LGBT issues. Our hope is that it is now less easy to sweep LGBT issues under the rug. Earlier, Lynne drew a parallel between the Canadian and American settings of the research studies; however, we would like to note a difference as well. Canada, in general, is a more accepting society towards the LGBT community, particularly in education. For example, in our inquiry group discussion following the reading of the article, the only argument not directly addressed was **force of facts**; we believe this is because in Canada, teaching about LGBT issues is not explicitly prohibited, or considered illegal, as it was in some of the contexts noted in Haertling Thein’s study.

Still, there is much work to be done, if LGBT children or those with LGBT family members are to see themselves in the literature or hear conversations about their lives in classroom. For educators willing to go to bat for the cause, Smolkin and Young (2011) offer educators suggestions for achieving inclusivity:

...you can begin by updating your resources...Beyond bringing new resources into your classrooms, you can bring a critical eye to professional books and journals, noting how diversity is defined and presented. You can determine which voices are affirmed and which are marginalized or silenced...If you are uncomfortable incorporating discussions of LGBT topics in your classroom, find someone in the community who can. (p. 224)

We are paying close attention to these suggestions. Theresa’s school has updated its library with LGBT resources. Lynne has introduced her students and research participants to professional literature that examines LGBT issues. We have brainstormed with teachers at Language Arts and Gay Straight Alliance conferences about ways to work with teacher discomfort so that voices too long silenced are heard. By providing

an example of professional development that encourages teachers to resist resistance of LGBT literature and issues, we hope we have encouraged other educators and educational researchers to push the boundaries of possibility—'cause it has to happen.

Notes

1. As our paper is a response to Haertling Klein's article, for the most part, we use the term LGBT, in keeping with the author. However, we acknowledge that terminology varies; accordingly, at other times we use what is most contextually appropriate (e.g., LGBTQ).
2. Pseudonyms have been used for all research participants mentioned with the exception of Theresa.
3. For more information on this national study, *Preservice Teachers' Perspectives on Canadian Identity and Their Understandings of Ideology in Multicultural Picture Books*, please see Johnston & Bainbridge (2013).
4. Due to space constraints, we cannot elaborate. For more detail on the court case, see Oberg (2003).
5. Resources can be found on the SOGI website: <https://sites.google.com/a/share.epsb.ca/sogi-resources/>
6. Charter schools have characteristics that set them apart from other public schools in meeting the needs of a particular group of students through a specific program or teaching/learning approach while following Alberta Education's Program of Studies. (Alberta Education, 2015)

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New Practices for a New Day: Principal Professional Development to Support Performance Cultures in Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on principal professional development in one school system in the United States to support a performance culture. With the leadership of the superintendent and central office leaders, principal learning communities were established to foster shared learning and professional development that enhanced their roles as lead learners in their buildings. Three primary themes emerged from the research: Beliefs Matter Only if Growth Matters, Transformational Professional Development Builds a Performance Culture, and Effective Professional Development Provides Safe Landing Change. The themes support that leading is learning. The implications of the research lie primarily in the realm of practice.

Pincipals matter second only to teachers in promoting gains in student achievement (Heck & Hallinger, 2009); hence, principals must foster the growth and development of teachers who are at the forefront of the instructional program in classrooms (Zepeda, Lanoue, Price, & Jimenez, 2014). The work of leaders has changed swiftly and dramatically because “improving teaching quality and reducing the variability within that quality is a primary responsibility of school district leaders, building level leaders, and teachers” (Davis, 2013, p. 3).

In the United States, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) called for highly qualified teachers defined as ones who held an appropriate certificate or take measures

to obtain one. In the U.S. context, teachers must be credentialed with appropriate certifications to teach; however, a highly qualified teacher is not necessarily an “effective teacher,” often defined as a teacher who can directly improve student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2012). Data from a 2009 Wallace Foundation study report found that principals spend about 67% of their time focused on management functions (e.g., dealing with discipline) and 30% of their time focused on the instructional program (e.g., observing teachers, participating in professional development with teachers, providing feedback). The work of principals continues to evolve, often forcing them to make choices about where to expend effort, time, and attention. Professional development can be a tool for systems to support leaders to focus or to refocus time and effort needed to be instructional leaders modeling learning for teachers.

This study examines what one system in the United States did to support principal professional learning so that its leaders were equipped to transform the learning environments in which they lead teachers. Through monthly Principal Learning Communities (PLCs) in which they participated in half-day meetings every month, we observed over a three-year period the processes, content, and skill development coaching used by the system administrators, led by the superintendent primarily and other key central office leaders, to foster a program of support for principals as they worked to transform their schools.

Introduction

Accountability necessitates that principals walk a tightrope supporting a performance environment and culture that both drives and inspires teachers to higher performance in the classroom. Although there are inherent tensions in the role of the leader as supervisor, evaluator, and professional developer of teachers, high-stakes testing, sweeping curricular initiatives, and the proliferation of standards of practice have necessitated that principals understand and apply more complex skills in many different ways to support the instructional program and teachers.

Changing Role of the Principal

A school system that has a unified vision and mission for learning and is able to operationalize it in practice does so by building the learning capacity of leaders—who

now must become the lead learners in their buildings. Principals can only transform their schools by supporting a culture that embraces the work teachers must do to lead students to learn in fundamentally different ways and settings. Essentially, “it is the principal, more than anyone else, who is in a position to ensure that excellent teaching and learning are part of every classroom” (Wallace Foundation, 2012, p. 3).

Without the capacity of the principal to evolve as the lead learner, the work of the school community will remain mostly static in developing a performance culture. Effective teaching thrives when principals create a culture of practice where they can ultimately:

- Establish a strong foundation through trust to grow partnerships with teachers, parents, students, site and system principals, and the central office;
- Allow students and teachers to take risks by putting safety nets in place;
- Focus on monitoring for results and establishing a readiness to be able to make mid-course changes;
- Create readiness for classroom transformations for new instructional practices and assessments; and,
- Align all efforts with the strategic plan to build system coherence.

For principals, this means that they must change from managing administrative tasks to becoming the “primary teacher developer and architect of collaborative learning” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 4).

Principal Professional Development

From the research and literature, professional development is effective when it extends over time (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011), includes follow-up as part of the process (Darling-Hammond & Falk, 2013), is embedded within the work day at the site (Zepeda, 2015), promotes collaboration and reflection on practice (Creemer, Kyriakides, & Antoniou, 2013), uses varied strategies (Drago-Severson, 2009), and is coherent, linking to other support processes such as supervision and coaching (Desimone, 2011; Zepeda, 2015). The research and literature about principal professional development not only mirror these ideas (Zepeda, Parylo, & Bengtson, 2013) but also emphasize:

- Common learning experiences (Zepeda, 2013) in a professional learning community (Honig & Rainey, 2014);

- The development of networks (Shakeshaft, Becker, Mann, Reardon, & Robinson, 2013) to mobilize knowledge with peer support (Chitpin, 2014) that reflects the “everyday fragmented world of schools” (Shakeshaft et al., 2013, p. 5);
- The context specific nature of the school and the system (Zepeda et al., 2013);
- Purposeful structures to be reflective in a collaborative space (Chitpin, 2014) to promote the “social construction of professional practice” (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004, p. 471); and,
- Promote an action orientation to address the need to continually change practice (Somprach, Popoonsak, & Ngang, 2014).

Research

Data for the present study were collected in tandem within a larger research effort that examined the tensions involved with a superintendent supervising and evaluating principals in a performance-based culture in one school district in the United States (Zepeda et al., 2014).

Research objectives. We wanted to learn about the professional learning provided to support principals in their transition to being the lead learner in a performance culture. We also wanted to examine the format and processes used during the monthly principal learning community (PLC) meetings.

Research methods. The research methods included shadowing primarily the superintendent (Gilliat-Ray, 2011; McDonald, 2005), observing the principal learning communities monthly meetings (Merriam, 1998), debriefing conversations (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2008), and analyzing artifacts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Data sources and collection. The primary data for this study came from five main sources gathered over four years: observations during the planning for professional learning, observations during PLCs and summer leadership retreats, observation of central office leaders conducting system-wide walk-throughs, agendas and other materials from the PLCs, and field notes from debriefing sessions with the superintendent. Secondary data regarding student performance were also used to highlight growth in achievement.

Data analysis. For each principal PLC, the primary researcher created a packet that included field notes, the agenda, and the notes from the debriefing. If there were notes from a shadow experience associated with a PLC, they were included in the packet. Meeting agendas were analyzed to examine both the order of and how information

was presented to the school leaders. The agendas typically contained a set of essential questions designed to guide the learning of the leaders, as well as a breakdown of how the information was presented. Through a coding system, we linked PLC: meeting content, processes used to work with the content, and the activities that the principals engaged in during PLCs.

Overview and Context of the Research Site

Located in Athens, Georgia (USA), the Clarke County School District (CCSD) serves just over 13,000 students in which 51% are African-American, 23% are Hispanic, 20% are White, and 2% are Asian. The demographic student composition has remained relatively consistent since the 2009-2010 academic year. Nearly 12% of the students have English as their second language, approximately 9% of the district's students are served through the English as a Second Language (ESOL) program, about 11% of students in the district are served through gifted education programs, and about 11% are special needs students. Athens-Clarke County, the seat of the CCSD, has the third highest poverty rate among United States counties with populations between 65,000 and 249,000. Over 30% of children in poverty—around 82% of students are eligible for the federal meal program and starting in the 2015-2016, all students in the district will receive free lunch through a federal Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) grant. In Athens, 49% of children live in single-parent homes and 19% of adults (>25 years) did not complete high school—both significant risk factors that can keep students from graduating from high school. Despite these factors, the district's current graduation rate is 71.5%, which is above the state average.

There are 2,691 employees—1,038 of which are teachers—with over 70% having advanced degrees, 250 certified in gifted education, 16 National Board Certified teachers, and 7 Georgia Master Teachers. On average, teachers in the CCSD schools have 11.29 years of experience while nationally the average for all school systems is 13.8 years of experience (Goldring, Gray, & Bitterman, 2013).

Leadership stability. The Clarke County School District, under the leadership of the current superintendent, has been remarkably stable in terms of principal longevity. The district has 21 schools, and a total of 14 principals have served as a principal in the district for the past six years. Eleven schools have had the same principal for the past six years. One school has experienced a principal change in the past six years, and three have had two principal changes. It is important to note that three of the principal changes were the result of current principals taking a position at another school within the district. Only one of the district's 21 schools has experienced a principal change

in the past three years. The CCSD was home to the 2015 American Association of School Administrators (AASA) National Superintendent of the Year, the 2015 Georgia Superintendent of the Year, the 2015 Middle Level National Distinguished Principal, and the 2013 State of Georgia Secondary Principal of the Year.

State of accountability and CCSD. Since 2009, the CCSD has undergone numerous transformations, focusing teaching, leading, and learning on student growth and development, and each one of these transformations necessitated professional learning to support school principals and assistant principals. The work of developing school leaders was purposeful and tailored to the needs of the system, its students, teachers, and school-level leaders who had to become the lead learners to be able to work with teachers in ways that supported students. The performance culture in the CCSD was summarized by the superintendent as such, “We are going to get it right for every student when they walk through the doors of our classrooms.” This new expectation required all teachers to use effective instructional practices and for principals to understand and support the uses of effective instructional practices by engaging teachers in conversations about their instructional impact on students.

The context of professional development in CCSD. Prior to 2009, professional learning for principals was a “sit and get” practice where external speakers would appear, present about some “generic” leadership concept, and then leave. Artifacts illustrated that many meetings dealt with managerial issues such as discipline, the examination of bell schedules for the middle and high schools, and so forth. Time for the principals to bring complaints to the superintendent was allocated; moreover, the meetings were described by a central office leader as a time for “leaders to complain” about students, teachers, and the community. The only constant across the meetings was the dedicated time, about an hour, for leaders to bring complaints to the superintendent. When examining artifacts, we could not discern any patterns of continuity of content, processes other than announcements, or activities in which principals were engaged in “doing” something other than listening or sitting. In other words, the principals were “not really converting the conversation into *insightful* action” (Fullan, 2008, p. 3, emphasis in the original).

Findings

The findings offer insights on principal professional development that supports practices that have, in our opinion, the ability to drill deeply into a school's beliefs and operations about the work required to help leaders transform a culture where teaching results in students learning at a high level. It is not the intention of the authors to generalize the findings of this study to other school systems; rather, we wish to disseminate the practices of one school system in which PLCs for principals proved to be highly effective and meaningful for leaders as they focused on leading their schools to meet the needs of children. With this caveat acknowledged, we move to the three interrelated themes distilled from the data:

- *Beliefs Matter Only if Growth Matters*
- *Transformational Professional Development Builds a Performance Culture*
- *Effective Professional Development Provides Safe Landing Change*

Beliefs Matter Only if Growth Matters

Cultures are built on beliefs that direct systems through clarity of the work required to transform schools toward growth. In the CCSD, replacing the monthly *meetings* by building monthly *professional learning communities* (PLCs) for principals signaled the belief, urgency, and expectation for leaders to be lead learners. Foundational to this shift is that principals had to have not only the skills but also more importantly, the dispositions and the courage to lead transformations that mirrored the direction of the district in their own buildings. The foundational belief was growth matters and that beliefs only matter if there is action toward growth.

The transition to a PLC necessitated building a foundation to be able to create a performance culture centered on growth and common expectations. As a group the principals were in many ways grappling with that as a collective, they had to build among themselves a common culture of expectations that mirrored the superintendent's vision of what the CCSD had to become—accountable for students, “first” and teachers “a close second, but all of this only matters with a strong leader.”

The urgency was visible: students overall were not necessarily faring well academically; the state had moved to standards-based curriculum and performance-based instructional strategies; and the state had data and processes for schools to assess and to measure school improvement efforts. Through the PLCs, CCSD created a dedicated space and forum where accountability and leadership could converge to build

a performance-based culture. The journey included engaging principals in identifying the fundamental concepts of a PLC, including the norms and values for learning.

The first six months of the PLCs included small- and large-group discussions in which principals envisioned what a learning community of teachers would look like in their buildings and how collaborative cultures were needed for teachers to engage in talking about teaching and learning, using data to inform instructional practices, and how to tie data from the school improvement plan to actionable decisions made in classrooms. At the center of each one of these activities was an essential question positioning the principal as an instructional leader (e.g., *How can instructional leaders use classroom observations to determine the performance level of a teacher in each CCSD Evaluation Standard?*).

It took time to build trust and to operationalize expectations and this led the leaders to develop the *Non-Negotiable Practices for High Student Performance*. The non-negotiable practices spelled out the expectations for a performance-based classroom. The second phase was to build a set of observable practices where the principals deliberated as a community what instruction would look and sound like in a classroom, examining the relationship between the non-negotiables and classroom observations. The third phase was to get principals in groups conducting system-wide classroom walk-throughs and then debriefing about what they observed. Building off this work, the next logical step was to develop a teacher evaluation system that would bring focus to the work leaders had to do to address teacher effectiveness while reinforcing the expectations the CCSD held. All of these efforts led the system and its teachers and leaders to move into the Commitments for High Student Performance.

Beliefs change over time. As example, the principals wrestled with their beliefs about teacher evaluation for an extended time, almost a year, as the CCSD Teacher and Leader Evaluation Systems were being built with input from leaders with the Non-Negotiables and the Observable Practices. The beliefs surrounding teacher evaluation were articulated:

For leader and teacher evaluations to be meaningful, these systems must be:

- Developmental and differentiated to meet the needs of the professionals in the system;
- Congruent with building and district-wide school improvement plans and processes;
- Foundational to the ideals embraced in the agreed-upon work of the system; and,

- Supported by the research and best practices related to the processes, procedures, and products of an evaluation system.

In a position statement made by the superintendent, “CCSD is fully committed to the ongoing learning and development of all our teachers and leaders across their careers” and moreover,

Our collective work has led to the development of a growth model to build instructional leadership capacity in the system, to develop a system that aligns with the instructional expectations found in a standards-based learning environment, and to develop ways to support teachers and teacher leaders at all levels—from exceptional to needing significant improvement.

In Table 1.1, the “old” and the “new” beliefs pre- and post-accountability culled from the findings of the present study served to ground the work of principals to be able to enact their roles as the lead learners and to develop the type of culture needed to transform teaching and learning in their buildings.

Table 1.1

Old and New Beliefs Related to Accountability and the Work of the Principal

OLD BELIEFS—LIMITED ACCOUNTABILITY ON SCHOOL AND TEACHER PERFORMANCE	NEW BELIEFS—FULL ACCOUNTABILITY ON SCHOOL AND TEACHER PERFORMANCE
I insulate teachers from parents to minimize disruptions in the learning process.	I <i>consistently</i> engage parents and teachers collectively to improve the learning process.
I am in the halls for much of the day to ensure an orderly environment (for all students).	I <i>consistently</i> am in classrooms most days to ensure (a challenging) and engaging environment for (all) students.
I create and follow a schedule to complete teacher and staff evaluations on time.	I <i>consistently</i> create a schedule to observe and to engage in conversations related to teacher influence on learning.
I delegate curricular decisions to instructional experts in the building.	I <i>consistently</i> lead processes to make curricular decisions that include instructional experts.
I monitor teacher planning.	I <i>consistently</i> engage in teacher planning.
I approve and arrange for professional development.	I <i>consistently</i> participate in professional development with teachers and staff.

OLD BELIEFS—LIMITED ACCOUNTABILITY ON SCHOOL AND TEACHER PERFORMANCE	NEW BELIEFS—FULL ACCOUNTABILITY ON SCHOOL AND TEACHER PERFORMANCE
I enact teacher evaluation.	I <i>consistently</i> hold the disposition that an evaluation system is a way to engage teachers in processes that promote growth.
I leave classroom observation notes in teachers' mailboxes.	I <i>consistently</i> provide timely feedback to teachers after all classroom observations to have conversations about student learning, engagement, the uses of digital tools, and personalization that supports teaching and learning.
I make announcements and disseminate information to teachers.	I <i>consistently</i> make teaching and learning priority areas to engage teachers—individually and school-wide in team and faculty meetings, and so forth—in conversations that focus on instruction.

During their work throughout the PLC, participants focused on developing the skills needed to change to the new work through engaging in inquiry, generative problem solving, dialogue, and reflection on their practices as school leaders. The discussions throughout the PLCs engaged principals to go beyond the nuts and bolts associated with “administrivia” and to focus more on the “talk about teaching” which provided the “inspiration” that linked together a new community. Although principals struggled at first, data revealed that their shift in roles and their efforts to foster trust were critical in creating the conditions necessary to build a learning community among themselves; however, the “struggle,” the “strain,” and the “awkwardness” supporting learning was necessary to transfer what they were doing in the PLCs within their own buildings.

Transformational Professional Development Builds a Performance Culture

In a performance culture, the end was clear—to improve student performance and to close the achievement gap. The work of the building and district leaders focused on how their collective work would change practices leading to that end. Transformative professional learning that builds a performance culture must be sustainable, where personal and professional commitments for ongoing learning permeate all that leaders do as they work with their teachers. Professional development that is transformational

allows “the principal to get from point A and B and beyond while anticipating future needs and ways to meet those needs,” according to the superintendent. Transformative professional development provides principals with numerous opportunities to personally and professionally reflect on their current practices, inquire about and implement new practices, and simultaneously to monitor the results in a public forum.

Content and processes. The content and processes used in the facilitation of monthly PLCs shifted a great deal the first year. There was variability in the time needed for discussions, working in small groups, and sharing ideas generated in small groups with the collective. The time spent on activities also changed as small groups gave signals that they needed more time, or if a discussion needed to be extended during larger group sharing. Principals began to ask critical questions of one another, and the superintendent. They wanted more time to process ideas, and the principals subtly stayed on topic by sharing strategies that they thought would work. In other words, the principals were inserting themselves through their practices in the process of learning. Around the same time, the superintendent and other central office leaders began to focus more intently on key areas such as poverty and learning, and they asked tough questions, “Can all students learn?” or “Do you know it when you see it?” related to high-yield instructional practices.

Transformational professional development is learning. School leaders cannot transform their cultures without first reflecting on their beliefs and making decisions on their own learning needs. It is through sifting through the “clutter” of one’s own ideas that perspectives emerge. Through testing out ideas, engaging in conversations that ask tough questions, or sharing a perspective that might go against the grain, leaders were able to solidify and test their learning as they evaluated their own skills.

The principals had to not only take responsibility for their own learning during the PLCs, but they also were expected to apply the knowledge or the content or the application of what was being examined in the PLCs in their own buildings. The instructional services division would create in-depth activities that could be replicated in the principals’ own buildings to engage in the same conversations with their teachers. In this way, principals could “lead these conversations” as the way to focus on “building capacity and fostering understanding.”

Modeling techniques and approaches by the superintendent and the central office team, simulations geared to what conversations could possibly look like, and the “free-flow” of ideas helped to create synergy within the group. In many ways, the organization of content, the methods used in the delivery of content, and the applications to

practice all led to demonstrate and connect high-performance expectations with high-performance learning models.

Conversations are at the heart of transformation. Conversations during the PLCs served to bring the principals along “when the topics were tough.” For example, the principals engaged in simulations around the content and this essential question: How do leaders prepare to have difficult conversations with teachers about instructional practices that are necessary for students to achieve at high levels? Through conversation, principals acquired the skills and the confidence to engage teachers in the ongoing and formative work related to improving practices, and the same was true of the superintendent who often engaged principals in tough conversations when issues arose.

Conversations are more than feedback about performance. During the PLCs, the superintendent modeled numerous types of conversations that principals could have with teachers and other personnel at the site. Focus was placed on helping principals learn how to ask questions so that they were poised in a way that supported conversations leading to inquiry on practice.

Through the conversations, beliefs unfold. Beliefs drive practice. A portion of each PLC included a segment on promoting reflection. For example, three questions can support the development of reflection needed to examine beliefs that must lead to action—1. Do you believe education is important? 2. Do you believe you can lead learning at a higher level? 3. Do you believe that all kids are learning at their highest level? Each conversation segment of the PLCs was designed to keep the principal focused on student performance and data that tells whether or not students are learning. Through conversations, the superintendent modeled thinking and approaches to address the thorny issues principals encounter as they lead instruction.

Changing beliefs leads to action and results. Student achievement data from the years prior to the implementation of the performance culture, when compared to data gathered after the performance culture was established, suggests that meaningful changes have occurred. Tables 1.2-1.4 highlight the gains in student achievement on the standardized state-required tests for the two years prior to the performance culture being established to the two most recent years in which data were available.

Table 1.2

***Two-Year Average Comparison of Student Achievement for Grades 3-8
on Standardized State-Required Tests in Mathematics***

Grade	2008/2009	2013/2014	Gain/Loss
3	62.0%	74.5%	+12.5
4	54.5%	70.5%	+16.0
5	60.5%	91.5%	+31.0
6	57.5%	73.5%	+16.0
7	66.5%	81.5%	+15.0
8	56.5%	85.5%	+29.0
*Establishment of Performance Culture Began in 2010 *Student Achievement defined as Meeting/Exceeding Standards			

Table 1.3

***Two-Year Average Comparison of Student Achievement for Grades 3-8
on Standardized State-Required Tests in English/Language Arts***

Grade	2008/2009	2013/2014	Gain/Loss
3	79.5%	81.0%	+1.5
4	78.0%	82.5%	+4.5
5	83.0%	91.5%	+8.5
6	79.5%	84.0%	+4.5
7	78.0%	88.5%	+10.5
8	83.0%	92.0%	+9.0
*Establishment of Performance Culture Began in 2010 *Student Achievement defined as Meeting/Exceeding Standards			

Table 1.4
Two-Year Average Comparison of Student Achievement for Grades 3-8
on Standardized State-Required Tests in Reading

Grade	2008/2009	2013/2014	Gain/Loss
3	79.0%	91.5%	+12.5
4	79.0%	87.0%	+8.0
5	78.0%	95.5%	+17.5
6	83.0%	93.5%	+10.5
7	75.5%	89.0%	+13.5
8	84.0%	96.5%	+12.5

*Establishment of Performance Culture Began in 2010
 *Student Achievement defined as Meeting/Exceeding Standards

Each grade level/subject combination experienced gains in student achievement since the implementation of the performance culture. The largest gains were achieved in mathematics, with a student achievement improvement in terms of percentage of students meeting or exceeding state standards, ranging from an increase of 12.5 to 31 percentage points. The range of increased student achievement was 1.5 to 10.5 percentage points and 8.0 to 17.5 percentage points for English/Language Art and Reading, respectively. The performance culture was implemented with one end, increasing student achievement. These results suggest changes implemented during this process had a meaningful impact.

Effective Professional Development Provides Safe Landing Change

The principals were being asked to approach leading in very different ways with the new work—focusing on data and implementing a new school improvement process, supporting teachers and a performance-based culture, engaging in different types of supervisory practices (e.g., frequent classroom observations), participating with teachers in professional learning, and using a new teacher evaluation system to promote teacher growth and development. It was a new day in CCSD.

Circles of support. During the monthly PLCs, principals were offered system and peer support as they worked to fine-tune their leadership skills—the very skills that had not necessarily been an expectation (e.g., being visible in classrooms). Also, with

the move to a performance-based culture, principals had to learn how to generate new conversations about high-yield instructional strategies with their teachers. These conversations were important because other transformations that focused on school improvement were occurring simultaneously, and the principals needed to be leaders with the uses of data to inform instruction, the implementation of common planning time, and so forth. The expectation held by the system was that the principal had to be at the forefront of these transformations leading their schools in the “new work.” At a key point during a PLC, the superintendent asked poignantly, “What do you [the principal] bring to the table when you meet and lead your teachers in our work?”

The PLC structure became the “safe learning ground” for principal learning. Through large- and small-group learning activities, book studies, and simulations, for example, the principals were able to share with one another as they learned from one another. Very often, principals were expected to carry out the very work accomplished in the PLCs in their buildings. By experiencing the “end result” of the work during the PLCs, the principals were better prepared to understand and lead the work in the buildings, and they were prepared to anticipate any “rough” terrain that might surface.

Safe landing change. In many ways, the principals were being asked to be change agents in their buildings to build a performance-based culture and to do so, the principals had to become the lead learners. They had to understand, recognize, and be able to discuss high-yield instructional strategies and so much more all in the context of transforming their schools. The work had to change, dramatically, and the principals were expected to be at the forefront to enact multiple and complex processes and procedures. The leaders had to add instructional leadership skills to their management and administrative skills. Student learning and engagement as well as the overall instructional program were at the forefront of the superintendent and the direction the CCSD was moving into to provide “every opportunity for students to achieve more.”

Through the circles of support offered during the monthly PLCs, principals could enact safe landing change that became more engaging and meaningful as they exerted leadership outside of the PLCs. During the PLCs, the principals were able to seek out new knowledge, reframe knowledge, modify or adapt how knowledge gets translated into practice in other buildings, and then walk into their buildings more prepared to enact change.

Networks. Through the PLCs, principals were able to know that they did not have to “go about things alone” because they were able to develop a network. Repeatedly, the principals would make reference that a fellow principal was “one phone call away.”

When things did not go as expected, the principals had a built-in safety net—each other. The CCSD is broken up into clusters comprising two or three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. As a natural outgrowth of the monthly PLCs, principals would meet with the other principals in their cluster. These meetings would occur informally before the school day started or after school. Together, the principals would wrap their collective thinking around results, intentions, and efforts needed to modify a particular approach, a common problem of practice, or share resources with one another.

Discussion and Summary

In the United States, federal and state policies, statutes, and systems are rooted in accountability. Situated within the context of school districts are internally held performance expectations that govern the ways schools run. Building a culture of performance expectations is much different than enforcing compliance with policies and regulations associated with an internal or external push for performance. The school district was dedicated to investing in the professional development to transform building level leaders. Whereas, the superintendent was resolute in his belief that to enact the type of changes that were needed to transform schools, principals were central to the process by honing skills that allowed them to lead complex and multi-dimensional systems.

Changing a culture centered on performance occurs over time and to be the lead learner, the principal must be in a position to support core changes at the building level. The movement to a PLC was a time-intensive process that involved the principals in changing their frames of reference from attending monthly meetings to being an active learner developing the skills needed to support cultural shifts aligned to the transformations expected in the district.

An interesting finding of this study was that learning was leading and in many ways that the new leader is really the new learner. When leaders as a whole are learners, they are ready to make changes in their practices. Understanding this finding lends support for the need for principal professional learning that supports the construction of knowledge.

To grow and develop as the lead learners of their buildings, principals must engage in professional learning opportunities that magnify focus on the leadership strategies

that can propel and sustain transformational learning environments within their own buildings. Transformative professional learning to build a performance culture can only be sustained when commitments for ongoing learning permeate all that leaders do as they work with their teachers. Transformative professional development requires principals to engage continuously in personal reflection, to inquire on their practices, and to monitor the results of their efforts individually and publicly.

The results of this study amplify numerous findings from other studies, namely that professional learning for principals yields positive results when they engage in common and “like” learning experiences (Honig & Rainey, 2014) in a collaborative space (Chitpin, 2014) that supports an action orientation to solve the thorny issues of practice (Somprach et al., 2014). Our study illustrates that it was strategic professional development that created a clear roadmap to support a performance culture. For this school system, a performance culture appears to be sustainable through the commonly held beliefs and shared learning as compared to a set of individual and independently driven practices. Moreover, coherence between the system, the schools, and the school leaders’ actions and beliefs was enhanced throughout the ongoing PLC meetings.

While the scope of this article is about principal professional development and the processes and lessons learned from the experiences in a PLC, one interesting aspect of the study signals the importance of the superintendent in framing what is needed to change the culture of the school system and the ability to drill down to the building level, to accept the responsibility to support principals, and to hold firm on expectations for principals to be the lead learners. The principals in this PLC were accomplished in every way possible; however, the principals had to reconcile the differences between their own beliefs and abilities against what was needed to support a culture for success for all students. In the final analysis, principals need support to make sense of their work, to learn from one another, and to stretch their skill set.

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