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High Quality Professional Development: An Investigation of the Supports for and Barriers to Professional Development in Arts Education

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Abstract

This study focused on a model of professional development designed to support and encourage arts educators to increase their understanding of student learning in the arts, broaden their knowledge of the Visual and Performing Arts Standards, build upon their repertoire of teaching methods and assessment strategies, and improve leadership skills. Data included 300 hours of observation, focus group and individual interviews, written responses to reflective prompts, unit plans, video and audio tapes, and samples of student work collected over a two year period. Findings indicated that working collaboratively, focusing on student learning, and identifying and planning curriculum around issues central to the discipline positively impacted teachers work. The issue of time constraints was consistently identified as a barrier to professional growth.

Introduction

Politicians, education leaders, parents and other community members in the United States are calling for large-scale reform in education as schools struggle to meet the needs of an aging education system. While there is a great deal of controversy regarding current reform efforts, few people question the fact significant changes in education can only occur when teachers are placed at the center of any effort to change

the system. Professional development continues to be a critical issue for concerned stakeholders looking for ways to improve American schools.

Professional Development

The concept of professional development in education has been shifting over the past several decades. The “new paradigm” of professional development has moved away from short-term teacher-training events where information is transmitted by an expert to a group of attentive listeners to a more constructivist model. This new model is based on the recognition that learning takes place over time and that active learning requires opportunities to link previous knowledge with new understandings (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001 and Upitis, 2005). Previous teacher training models including those focused on individual classroom practices are no longer seen as adequate for current reform initiatives (Little, 1993; see also Jeffers, 1996). New models of professional development focus on building cultures of inquiry linked to student achievement and school reform (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 1998).

Meaningful professional development involves opportunities for teachers to reflect critically on their practice, question their beliefs about teaching and learning, and bring new ideas and practices into the classroom (Darling-Hammond, & McLaughlin, 1995). In a report published by the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education (1996), high quality professional development programs were described as those that support teachers in meeting the needs of diverse learners; provide adequate time for practices that involve inquiry, reflection, and mentoring; are subject centered; and are rigorous, leading to long-term change.

Recent legislation has called for this new paradigm to be implemented across the country. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires all states receiving Title I: Section A funds to provide “high quality” professional development opportunities for teachers. Components of a high quality professional development program as defined in the NCLB document include activities that “are high quality, sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on classroom instruction and the teacher's performance in the classroom.” In addition, the NCLB legislation calls for programs to improve teachers’ academic content knowledge, advance teacher understanding of effective instructional strategies for improving student academic achievement, enable teachers who work with students with limited English proficiency to provide instruction and use appropriate language and academic supports, provide methods for teaching students with special needs, and help teachers better understand the use of technology and assessment. “High quality” professional development programs should be “developed with extensive participation of teachers, principals, parents, and administrators of schools...” (NCLB, 2001).

In a recent article published in *Arts Education Policy Review*, Conway et al. (2005) linked research specific to arts education with the literature in general education

and the recommendations outlined in the NCLB legislation. While the literature base specific to arts education is small, current work suggests arts teachers should be given the opportunities to participate in learning experiences that address specific arts-centered issues (Conway, 2003). Further, research suggests that professional development takes place over time (Upitis, 2005) and should involve collaboration where arts teachers can share their expertise with each other (Conway, 2003). Bringing together groups of arts teachers allows them to share specific ideas about teaching in their content area.

One model of professional development that may hold promise for arts educators is the subject-specific teacher collaborative. Little (1993) described two promising accounts of subject-specific professional development programs in her article *Teachers' Professional Development in a Climate of Educational Reform*. The two programs, Philadelphia's humanities collaborative (PATHS) and The Urban Mathematics Collaborative, engaged teachers with other professionals in on-going inquiry with the intent to strengthen teachers' interest in and understanding of the subject matter content. Both of these programs called on teachers to be actively involved in research, inquiry, and reflection and to connect their own learning to the classroom.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of arts teachers participating in a subject-specific teacher collaborative. Specifically, this study investigated the impact of participation in The Collaborative Design Institute (CDI), a subject matter collaboration developed and implemented by teachers working through The California Arts Project, on arts teachers' beliefs and behaviors.

Theoretical Perspective

High quality professional development programs are frequently described as those that provide adequate time for practices that involve inquiry, reflection, and mentoring; are subject centered; and are rigorous, leading to long-term change. Over the past twenty years researchers have focused a great deal of attention on professional development and have looked at ways to facilitate meaningful change in schools. The model used for this study is reflected in the work of Little (1993) who identified six design principles for professional development:

1. Professional development offers meaningful intellectual, social, and emotional engagement with ideas, with materials, and with colleagues.
2. Professional development takes explicit account of the contexts of teaching and the experience of the teachers.
3. Professional development offers support for informed dissent.
4. Professional development places classroom practice in the larger contexts of school practice and the educational careers of children.

5. Professional development prepares teachers as well as students and their parents to employ the techniques and perspectives of inquiry.
6. The governance of professional development ensures bureaucratic restraint and a balance between the interests of individuals and the interests of institutions.

These six guiding principles outline a collaborative model of professional development that facilitates teachers' deeper understanding of the content, allows for exploration of complex issues, and places teachers at the heart of process. Professional development can no longer focus on providing information to teachers but must strive to effect meaningful change in how and what is being taught. Therefore, the conceptual framework for this study links professional development with transformative theory and the change process. Looking at theories surrounding adult learners and transformative learning provided the framework to understand and evaluate the experiences of teachers involved in long-term, inquiry based professional development.

The theory of transformative learning describes how adults can change beliefs and attitudes or transforms meaning structures (Imel, 1998; Mezirow, 1991). Two aspects of transformation theory are particularly relevant to adult learning associated with professional development, critical reflection and disorienting dilemmas. Reflection is a key tenant of transformation theory when looking at how adult learners change or transform meaning schemes. Transformative learning results when adults reflect on the content of a problem, the process of problem solving, or the premise upon which the problem is predicated (Mezirow, 1991). Rather than relying on quick fixes to specific questions, adults learn by thoroughly investigating a problem. This often requires the adult to investigate the cause of the problem and to consider multiple solutions before deciding upon a course of action. A second component of transformation theory involves disorienting dilemmas, those situations that challenge preconceived ideas. When adults are faced with situations that do not fit expectations or currently held "meaning schemes" they transform their thinking and beliefs (Dover, 2005). According to Mezirow (1997), transformative learning occurs when individuals change their frames of reference by critically reflecting on assumptions and beliefs and consciously embracing new ways of thinking.

Transformative theory is rooted in constructivist theory; meaning is constructed through individual and social processes. Meaningful learning occurs when new ideas are examined individually and collaboratively. Collaborative conversations allow adult learners to critically explore meaning within the context of their own knowledge and understandings. Through dialogue, individuals can contribute to group understanding by sharing lived experiences. Collaborative conversations help learners situate new knowledge within the framework of personal experiences and facilitate questions that lead adults to examine their core beliefs and the traditions of their profession.

The Collaborative Design Institute Model

The Collaborative Design Institute (CDI) was designed to bring together groups of arts educators to develop and field-test standards-based instructional units. Over the course of a year (150 contact hours), participants engaged in three areas of professional development: 1) curriculum design, 2) creative inquiry, and 3) arts leadership. The Institute was organized into eight blocks beginning in July and running through the first week in April. Blocks one and two were four days long; blocks three, seven, and eight were each two days in length; and block four was three days long. Participants could choose to stay in residence during these blocks of time or they could choose to travel to and from the institute site. Blocks five and six were arranged independently to accommodate school calendars during the lesson study phase of the institute. While much of the institute was held during summer break and on Saturdays, several dates were held during the school year. Funds were allocated to cover the expense of substitute teachers when necessary.

Throughout the course of the institute, participants worked in cadres of 4-6 teachers, all of whom taught in the same arts discipline (dance, music, theatre, or visual arts). The cadres worked collaboratively to design, implement, and assess units of study using the “backwards design” model outlined in *Understanding by Design* (Wiggins and McTighe, 2000). Each cadre decided upon a single idea, an enduring understanding, important to their discipline and worthy of study. After selecting the “big idea”, cadre members worked their way backwards identifying relevant standards, deciding upon appropriate materials, and planning lessons that would best lead students to grasp the enduring understanding. Each of the cadre members then taught the unit to in their classrooms.

As the units were taught, the teachers participated in an action research “lesson study” as outlined in *The Teaching Gap* (Stigler and Hiebert, 1999). Participating teachers field-tested a single lesson from the unit by having one cadre member implement the lesson at their school site. The other cadre members visited the school during the day of the lesson study and observed the students as they engaged in the lesson. After the lesson was completed, all cadre members met to discuss what occurred and then revised and refined the lesson based on the observations. A second cadre member then taught the revised lesson with observers focused on whether the revisions resulted in enhanced student learning.

Throughout the institute, teachers were encouraged to engage in the creative process as artists through the personal exploration of a creative inquiry. Dedicated time was allotted for participants to engage in their art form; art teachers created 2D and 3D art, dance teachers danced or choreographed new dances, theatre arts teachers worked on monologues or completed design work, and music teachers sang, played instruments, or composed original scores. Time was also scheduled for teachers to learn about current

arts education issues, recent research findings, and opportunities for further involvement in arts education at the local and state level.

Research Methods

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of art educators participating in a year long professional development program. Two research questions framed this study: What were the supports for and barriers to teacher learning when participating in “high quality” professional development? What was the impact of “high quality” professional development on teacher and student learning? Because this study was designed to document a program already in place and to better understand the experiences of groups of educators, ethnographic methods were employed. The ethnographic data allowed me to gain a better understanding of how participation in this program impacted arts education in the classroom from the unique perspectives of the teachers involved.

Participants

The Collaborative Design Institute is structured to accommodate cadres of teachers representing the four arts disciplines (dance, music, theatre, and visual arts). Applicants had to demonstrate the necessary financial support from their district or campus for registration, as well as for the release time necessary to participate in all aspects of the institute. Participants could choose to enroll in continuing education credit through one of the local universities or to use the hours to fulfill the requirements for professional development when needed.

Fifty-seven arts educators participated in two institutes and provided data for this study. Of the fifty-seven, thirty-seven arts educators participated in the 2002/2003 Institute (three dance teachers, seven music teachers, three theatre teachers, and twenty three visual arts teachers). Twenty-five teachers participated the following year - three dance teachers, seven music teachers, three theatre teachers, and eleven visual arts teachers. Of these twenty-five, five had participated in the 2002/2003 CDI and were serving as cadre leaders or institute facilitators. During the 2003/2004 institute, I selected one cadre to provide additional data through participation in a focus group discussion and in a series of individual interviews. I also observed this cadre as they worked together to develop their unit plan. The cadre consisted of six music teachers: a high school band director, a middle school band director, an elementary general music teacher, and three middle school general music teachers.

Data Collection

Data collection began during the summer of 2002 when I joined the Collaborative Design Institute as an outside observer and continued during the 2003/2004 school year.

Participants knew that I was a university professor investigating the CDI and that I would be observing their work and asking them to respond (in writing) to questions regarding the institute. Three hundred hours of observation were completed during the institute and provided data for this project. Detailed field notes were taken during the observations and the data were transcribed immediately following each of the observations. Additional observations were completed at six school sites during the lesson studies. Each of these six observations lasted between two and three hours. The lesson studies were video taped and field-notes recorded my observations.

During the 2003/2004 CDI, I conducted an initial focus group interview with the music cadre during the first week of the institute. This interview focused on participants' previous experiences with professional development and their expectations for the CDI. The interview was tape-recorded and data were later transcribed. Members of the music cadre participated in formal and informal interviews throughout the institute; each member was interviewed at least four times. Formal interviews were tape-recorder and data were transcribed. Notes were taken during informal interviews and again, the data were transcribed along with descriptions of the setting and circumstances surrounding the interview. A follow-up interview was conducted with each of the six cadre members six months after the CDI. The follow-up interviews were conducted on the phone with interviews tape-recorded and data transcribed.

During the institute, all of the participants were asked to respond to written reflective prompts as part of the daily routine. The participants written responses were collected and provided valuable data. Additional written data included unit plans, charts from group discussions, documents produced during debriefing sessions, and samples of student work. Audiovisual data included videotapes of the lesson studies, video examples from participants' creative inquiry projects, and audio and video documentation of debriefing sessions. Both two dimensional and three dimensions samples of art projects and video and audio recordings served to document teachers' participation in the creative inquiry process and student work resulting from the unit implementation.

Archived data from the 2001/2002 CDI served as a secondary source of information. The archived data included participant notebooks, completed unit plans, video and audio recordings of lesson studies, and samples of student work.

Analysis

As the principal researcher, I engaged in several layers of data analysis as outlined by LeCompte and Schensul (1999). Initially, the research questions framed the analysis; salient items were identified and coded. I then began to compare and contrast items looking for patterns consistent with or in opposition to the theoretical framework and findings from previous research. These two levels of analysis began early and continued throughout the study. I then spent the summer working with the data, re-reading transcripts, reviewing primary and secondary source materials, and conducting follow-up

interviews. As I continued to work with the data, I began to look for relationships between and among the items and patterns in order to identify significant structures or themes. Data sets were then coded according to the emergent themes. I then worked with the data to determine the most prominent findings relevant to this study. Two participants read through the data and served as peer reviewers for the findings and conclusions.

Trustworthiness/Triangulation

The primary techniques used to address the trustworthiness (validity) of this study were data collection triangulation, member checks, and attention to investigator expertise (Patton, 1990; Seidman, 1991). The variety of data-collection measures described above constituted data triangulation for this study. By collecting data through interviews, observations, survey materials, reflective prompts, unit plans, student work samples and secondary sources the accuracy of data obtained from one source was confirmed through the use of information gathered from different sources (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Two participants served as peer reviewers reading the data and discussing the conclusions. As the principal investigator, I relied on my knowledge of professional development and on standards based arts education as well as my experiences during the CDI to verify the findings.

Results and Discussion

Collaboration

Transformative theory describes collaborative conversations as valuable to adult learners. In this study, these conversations emerged as one of the most important components of professional development. Teaching is often viewed as an autonomous and sometimes isolating career choice; this is particularly true for music, theatre, dance or visual arts teachers who are frequently the only arts teacher in their own discipline on a campus. Similar to the findings of Clark (2001) and Birman, Desimone, Porter, and Garet (2003), the teachers in this study treasured the opportunity to collaborate with other teachers in the same discipline. The arts teachers had a shared set of ideas and a vocabulary that allowed them to understand one another. The discipline specific cadre model framed a collaborative environment that was frequently cited as the single most important component of the CDI. One of the middle school general music teachers wrote:

The collaboration with so many music colleagues has been wonderful. It has provided me with an array of ideas that has reinforced my teaching in a way that has provided support, reassurance, and understanding. I have felt very alone in the music profession until now.

Several of the teachers described how important it was to work with their cadre members and also collaborate across disciplines during various stages of unit development. In fact, all of the participants at one time or another described the

advantages of collaboration; several reflective prompts included the phrase “two heads are always better than one.” One visual artist went on to write: “It is beneficial to bust out of my teaching isolation - - colleagues have much to offer... The act of working collaboratively is synergistic - - Bonus! I need fellow artists to bounce ideas off of.”

Many of the teachers described how working collaboratively challenged them to listen to different points of view and caused them to question their once firmly held beliefs. During a phone interview, one teacher described it this way:

It is really hard to find music teachers around who are willing to collaborate. I think a lot of us are very stubborn, when we have an idea we want to think it is the greatest idea...so it is nice to get into a place where you have to work together as a team and realize other peoples' ideas are just as valuable as yours. It is nice to have a resource of other people you can turn to if you have questions.

While most of the participants expressed positive feelings about collaboration, the act of collaborating presented the participants with certain challenges.

[Collaboration] is not as easy as one might think. Especially because, as arts teachers, most of us are accustomed to being on our own and alone, teaching and planning the way we see fit. While the 3rd grade teachers are all at their grade level meetings, we are (I am) back in the band room trying to write a 4th clarinet part for the Star Spangled Banner, before that evening's performance. But I think our cadre is really getting good at working collaboratively and it is evidence by the amount of work we are cranking out. I have learned that I need to continue to learn how to be more collaborative!

Many of the participants reported on the challenges of collaboration when beliefs and ideas were in conflict with each other. Field-notes described conflicts among cadre members over curricular choices, cultural issues, and artistic preferences. Some cadre members reacted to these conflicts by shutting down and quietly sitting as others debated the issue at hand. Other members were more vocal during times of conflict and tried to persuade others to their way of thinking. There were moments of conflict within each of the cadres, yet all of the cadres were able to move past their differences and develop a working relationship. The music cadre, for example, had a particularly vocal member who tended to advocate for a single idea without allowing alternative views to be expressed. Eventually, the cadre members openly discussed the differences in their personalities and the need to hear everyone's ideas. The cadre discussed the value of brainstorming and looked for ways to get more ideas on the table before agreeing on a single direction. They were able to work out a protocol that allowed all participants to express their ideas without interruption. The “vocal” participant initially felt he was being attacked and became very quiet during part of the discussion. The group worked through the problem, assured the participant that his ideas were valued, and found a way to work together. While these challenging moments caused discomfort for some participants, they often served as the “disorienting dilemmas” identified by Dover (2002) as necessary for

adult learning. One participant wrote, “I realize that I gravitate towards the same types of assessments that I’m comfortable with. Working with others forced me to consider alternative assessments which turned out to be just as valid.”

The participant quoted above not only had to rethink his position on assessment, but he also learned that he was a bit set in his ways. This type of self realization frequently grew out of collaborative conversations; participants often talked about learning more about themselves than they had anticipated as they worked with their colleagues. During one of the interviews, the middle school band director stated: “I feel myself emerging out of a couple of difficult years, both personally and professionally, as a much stronger person...I have grown in my appreciation for my colleagues here at the CDI and back at my school. We are all in the journey together!”

Focusing on the “Heart of the Discipline”

While participants most often cited the transformative power of collaboration as the strongest support for learning, developing curriculum based on the concept of enduring understandings was most closely associated with student learning. In *Understanding by Design*, Wiggins and McTighe (2000) outline a backwards design model for curriculum that begins with identifying the big ideas or enduring understandings that are at the heart of the discipline. For example, the six music teachers observed during the second year of the study chose to work with the enduring understanding “Music changes when cultures interact.” They selected standards that best supported this enduring understanding, identified the skills and knowledge necessary to meet the standards, determined acceptable evidence of student learning, and designed a unit with activities sequenced specifically to guide students to the understanding that music of one culture could be impacted by another culture. When asked during the follow-up interview what had caused her to change her teaching, an elementary music teacher stated:

UBD [Understanding by Design] was totally new to me, I’ve never implemented anything like this - it is great! When you go step by step to reach a goal...well it is different to have the end in mind and then decide how to get there. That is what I **needed** to learn...that is what I needed to learn. (MGM)

Most of the participants linked their work with UBD directly to student learning. A visual arts teacher expressed best the views offered by many of the participants:

It’s so important to get to the heart of the discipline and teach what’s really essential. When it’s new, it has to be broken down to really “get it.” And it requires a whole shift in thinking from the way most teachers at this point in time, have been trained/directed to plan curriculum. But when the shift occurs, the process becomes easier. It really refines one’s content knowledge and helps us find ways to create deeper understanding for our students. And hopefully, with the

better-accepted-standards-based practice, this model of curriculum design will improve achievement overall for our students.

Focusing on Student Learning

There were several facets of the CDI that caused the participants to focus on student learning in new ways. As participants worked to develop unit plans, they were frequently guided through activities such as cross discipline debrief sessions that caused them to look for areas that would be difficult for students or where students might misunderstand information. The effectiveness of these activities was evident in the abundance of revisions that were made to the unit plans and lessons studies. Comments written in the margins or on post-it notes frequently pointed out instances where students might struggle, either because of gaps in prior learning experiences or because of the use of academic language that might be confusing. These comments often led to changes in the sequence or the introduction of new material in subsequent drafts of the unit plans.

While working with enduring understandings and participating in debriefing sessions caused teachers' attention to shift towards student learning, the lesson study was the strongest influence on teachers' beliefs about student learning. As lessons were taught, cadre members observed the students looking for those "ah ha" moments and identifying gaps in understanding. An elementary music teacher described the unique experience:

It isn't very often that I've gotten to observe other music classes, when I did my student teaching – even when we observed, it was only a couple of times that the teacher was in front of us. It was amazing to see what you don't see as a teacher. We saw a lot of kids who just got it. That was amazing to watch that...they got excited when they caught on to something it was fun to watch and see those ah-ha moments. We don't necessarily get to see that all the time.

Not only did teachers enjoy watching the students learn, they often changed their beliefs about what the students were capable of doing. During my observation of a visual art lesson I observed students discussing the placement of articles in a particular painting and why the placement mattered. My field-notes focused on four middle school boys who initially used several small props provided for the lesson as tools for a small, under that table, sword fight. The teacher began the lesson by showing examples of art representing two distinct styles: surrealism and photo-realism. She then asked students to discuss the content of the artwork and possible meanings. As the teacher began to draw students into a conversation about the examples and the meaning behind the choices the artists made, the attention of these four boys shifted. They put down the props and engaged in conversations about how artists communicate through the choices they make. After the introduction, the four students were given a poster of a landscape painting and instructed to work collaboratively to decide which of the small objects they wanted to place into the

painting. They were also instructed to choose where to place the object, and write a short explanation of their choices.

As a result of the lesson, these boys became engaged in a discussion about how art could reflect current issues facing society. They chose to place a small metal screw into the landscape picture to represent people's growing dependence on technology and the resulting loss of natural resources. As they described where to place the object for the greatest impact, they discussed the importance of perspective and how contrast can be used to emphasize a point. During the debrief session for the lesson, several teachers and an administrator who had participated in the lesson study commented on the focused energy demonstrated by the middle school students. All of the observers commented on their surprise that students were so engaged in the lesson and capable of such intense work.

Many of the teachers involved in the CDI expanded their ideas about what students were capable of doing. As noted in the following written reflection, students frequently responded to the lessons by exceeding teachers' expectations.

The experiences [with the lesson study] have been more than memorable, and by more than memorable, I mean, thought provoking opportunities for great learning for me as an educator. One thought that will endure is that we reached our goal. We wanted our students to think deeply and analytically about a particular subject and they did!! ...I guess one of the most memorable experiences I had, was the realization that our students are thinking beings, that they will think deeply and analytically, and (oh my gosh) may even enjoy it if we can allow them the time and opportunity to do so.

Barriers

Uptis (2005) described time limitations as the "perennial and universal lament among artists, artist-teachers, and teachers alike." The participants in this study were no exception and the lack of time was consistently identified as the single greatest barrier to professional development. Most of the participants valued their work and recognized the positive impact of in-depth planning on student learning, yet many felt they did not have the time to consistently work this way.

The CDI model involved participants staying in residency for blocks of time – this was often cited as one of most important strengths of the program and was also identified as one of the major challenges. While most of the participants believed the time spent was life changing, several mentioned the difficulties associated with being away from family including one of the middle school general music teachers: "For me it was difficult to be away from family in the dorms – at times it was kind of nice, but obligations at home had to be taken care of before you left."

While the passion these teachers had for their students was the driving force behind participation, this passion also served as a barrier when participation required the

teachers miss school. Substitute teachers were provided to participants whenever the work of the CDI required them to be away from their school site, however teachers struggled with being away from their classrooms. As the elementary instrumental music teacher stated:

For me the biggest challenge was the amount of time. Taking off from school was really difficult for me. I know it is for all teachers. In my case, if I miss one day at my school I don't see those students that week. For the classes that I saw on Friday, I didn't get to see them much. That was the most challenging. I had complete support from administration but I had trouble missing at school.

The participants explicitly identified the time issues as a hurdle that had to be overcome. A second barrier to change, however, had more to do with American traditions than time and while not explicitly identified by the participants emerged from field-notes and videotaped observations. Teachers in American schools tend to cover large amounts of material and spend a great deal of time on review (Stigler and Hiebert, 1999). During the CDI, teachers were challenged to go deeper into their academic content, identify enduring understandings that were at the heart of the discipline, and plan units of study that would guide students to a deeper understanding. The initial unit plans tended to be very broad and often covered large amounts of information. As teachers worked collaboratively, they were able to develop units designed to cover less information but more in depth. As a result, students observed during the lesson studies were often engaged in conversations that reflected a deep understanding of unique aspects of the arts.

While there was definitely a shift in planning and teaching, observations revealed there was still a struggle to completely embrace a new way of teaching. Teachers were not always able to allow students the time to reflect on and respond to probing questions. After brief silences, many of the teachers would reframe questions or provide additional information so as to steer students towards a particular way of thinking. Either because of the traditional ways of teaching, or perhaps because of the current focus on effective and efficient use of class time, teachers tended to want to fill in any gaps in time with further instruction or clarification and speed the lesson along.

Conclusion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to investigate the supports for and barriers to teacher learning when participating in "high quality" professional development. Allowing teachers to work collaboratively to explore both their discipline and student learning proved to be particularly valuable for these teachers. Through conversations, classroom observations, and exposure to different theories on education these teachers changed their beliefs about what was important in art education and about what their students were capable of doing.

This study also investigated the impact of high quality professional development on teachers' and student learning. There was a transformation in the beliefs and behaviors of these teachers as they worked collaboratively to positively impact arts education. The teachers reported a better understanding of their discipline, the content standards, student learning, and planning. While their teaching continued to be fairly directed, there was a change in how they planned and how they sequenced instruction.

There was a great deal of evidence that student learning was positively impacted during the unit implementation. Videotapes and samples of student work showed that as a result of their work during the implementation of the unit plans, students were able to discuss complex ideas using appropriate art vocabulary. For example, when students in the dance classes were challenged to choreograph a human emotion, the students discussed the use of space, time, shape, energy, and movement as it related to the emotion. Students were able to critique each other's dances and refine their own work referring to the elements of dance. Students involved in the music, visual art, and theatre lesson studies demonstrated similar abilities to discuss the arts using appropriate vocabulary and getting to a deeper understanding of arts experiences. Rather than talk about what they liked or disliked, the students observed during the lesson studies discussed how the elements of a specific art form were used and whether the choices made (either by students or artists) resulted in the desired outcome. Teachers frequently commented on their surprise at the level of thinking that was demonstrated by students as they worked through the various units. In addition, the students' excitement and enthusiasm for their work grew as they worked through the unit plans focusing on enduring understandings. As one teacher described:

I think the most memorable thing of the lesson study was watching the kids collaborate to create an ostinato of their own. Each group had great ideas, but to watch and listen to the interactions was amazing. Kids who were very quiet and sometimes seemingly unengaged took on leadership roles. Kids discussed their viewpoints and gave input for the ostinato.

The results of this study indicated that high quality professional development did impact teacher and student learning. The collaborative conversations challenged these teachers to reflect on and refine their beliefs about teaching. The action research component served as the disorienting dilemma or catalyst for change for many of the teachers. Seeing students engaged in conversations and activities that took them deeper into the subject matter was a powerful experience and caused many of the teachers to rethink their low expectations for student work. There was a discrepancy between what the teachers originally believed students were capable of doing and what the students actually accomplished. Teachers connected the success of the students to sequencing instruction around the bigger idea, the enduring understanding.

Through collaborative conversations, teachers were able to identify what was at the heart of learning and they were able to sequence instruction so that students "got it."

There was however, a level of apprehension or frustration at having to take this new found knowledge back to a system that isolated them from other teachers; a system that didn't allow them the time to think deeply about their practice or plan detailed lessons. Many expressed the desire to shift from the autonomous world of teaching to a more collaborative inquiry based profession. The teachers in this study described their participation in the CDI as "life-changing" and expressed a desire for similar experiences to continue throughout their teaching careers. While data indicated that both teacher and student learning were positively impacted by participation in the Collaborative Design Institute, further research is needed to determine the long term effect of participation and the impact on student learning. The findings of this study indicate the potential of on-going, collaborative programs in an effort to reform education. This model of reform, however, would require a restructuring of the school day to allow time for collaboration and intense planning and would require a commitment on the part of administrators and policy makers to ensure that schools and teachers have the resources necessary to implement systemic change.

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