Professional Development: Partnerships for Success

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Abstract

This article contributes to the discussion of teacher training and preparation. It presents the implementation of a professional development project conducted by two university professors in the northeastern part of the U.S. Participants included two middle school teachers and three pre-service teachers at an economically unstable Catholic diocesan school. The article begins with a statement of context and a review of literature that addresses the positive effects and need for teachers' professional learning. A theoretical framework is included to offer readers a generalized perspective on professional development initiatives. An implementation model and a summary of the instruction and outcomes follow. Findings include the positive effects of (a) university-based partnerships with local underserved schools, (b) skills-based learning and interdisciplinary professional development as a means for improving teachers' content knowledge; and (c) pre-service teachers' involvement in professional development as a part of their training.

Key words: professional development, teacher training, school partnerships, pre-service field experience, constructivist theory, collaborative learning, content instruction, literacy instruction

Introduction

This article contributes to the discussion of teacher training and preparation. It presents the implementation of a professional development project for two middle school teachers at an economically unstable Catholic diocesan school in the northeastern part of the United States. It begins with a brief statement of context and presents a review of relevant literature that addresses the positive effects and need for teachers' professional learning. A theoretical framework is provided to offer readers a broad and generalized perspective of the project; a description of the implementation model follows, along with a detailed description of the professional development instruction and its outcomes. Lastly, the article offers analyses and discussion of self-reported data from the project's participants. Findings demonstrate the positive effects professional learning opportunities provide for teachers.

1. Literature Review

I conducted this project in my role as a university professor of English Education at a four-year liberal arts university. It served as a pilot to test an implementation model and its theoretical framework. When pre-service teachers return to campus from field experience visits, they often comment on how much time teachers spend with students in the course of a day. "*When do teachers get to meet and talk to each other?*" they ask. The response is always the same: "*You'll spend 95% of your time with your students, and the remaining 5 with fellow teachers. It's the nature of the job.*" Darling-Hammond (2011) found that 90% of U.S. teachers participate in workshops or conferences only one to two days in an academic year, and well under half get sustained professional development, mentoring and opportunities to observe other classrooms. As well, in 2004, only 17% of U.S. teachers reported cooperative exchange among colleagues. This percentage shrank to 15% in 2008 (Darling-Hammond, 2011).

This article addresses the overall need for teacher professional learning initiatives and the effectiveness of small-scale, university-based projects using content-specific training.

There is much written on the general need for teachers' professional growth, especially large-scale initiatives. According to Snow-Gerono (2004), professional development school partnerships create safe environments for dialogue among teachers that can lead to better instruction. These partnerships come in all shapes and sizes and are known by a variety of names. Zwart, Wubbels, Bergen and Bolhuis (2009) refer to professional development as "reciprocal peer coaching," a "configuration of activities that a dyad of teachers can undertake in the workplace with the intention of supporting each other's teaching" (p. 244). "Teacher learning" is considered any "ongoing work-related process that leads to a change of cognition and/or behavior" (p. 246). "Teacher Inquiry" (Snow-Gerono, 2004) and "collegial study groups" (Dana & Yendol-Silva, 2003) are other titles used for professional teacher training.

School reform leaders' current efforts to increase student achievement and improve learning have resulted in focused national attention to teacher training and support initiatives. Organizations abound. The U.S. National Association for Professional Development Schools provides a forum for sustained collaborative school-university partnerships. The U.S. National Network for Educational Reform *(*2012) is a membership network similarly dedicated to the simultaneous renewal of schools and the institutions that prepare teachers. As well, The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (2012) is a national alliance of educator preparation programs committed to the highest quality professional development for teachers and school leaders. Similar organizations have grown at rapid speed in the past 20 years.

1.1. Content Driven Professional Development

Wayne, Yoon, Zhu, Cronen, and Garet (2008) report that content development is more influencial than instruction in pedagogy. Borko (2004) demonstrates that, indeed, vital professional development programs foster teacher improvement. She studied the positive effects from individual professional development programs conducted at a single site by those who designed the program. This present project adds to this research on single-site professional learning, a model involving small-scale and thus cost effective training.

Kennedy (1998) also found that programs focusing on teachers' subject knowledge are more effective than those that address pedagogy. As well, Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman and Yoon (2001) provide data that demonstrate the connections between "best practices" in professional development and self-reported change in teachers' knowledge and skills. They found that professional learning of teachers' academic subject matter resulted in stronger student outcomes. They cite four core features of effective development: (a) sustained instruction; (b) students' academic achievement as its primary goal; (c) focused instruction on matters of curriculum and pedagogy, and (d) opportunities for teachers' reflection. In her discussion of the Council of Chief State School Officers' (CCSSO) commitment to the U.S. National Common Core State Standards initiative, King (2011) iterates the need for university professors' engagement in Core Standards' professional development for K-12 teachers. She cites statewide groups in the academic disciplines as one venue for professional learning and emphasizes the need for not only content-driven teacher development, but this collaboration between higher education and K-12 (2011).

2. Theoretical Framework

We sought out well-established theories of adult learning to drive our instruction. Of primary importance was a strong theoretical basis for collaborative, constructivist and active learning. Because adults are challenged in ways adolescents are not, professional learning must be more socially balanced. While teachers of young children are more naturally viewed as leaders and authority figures, adult learning situations, even with facilitators delivering the instruction, invite a level of ambiguity requiring serious consideration. Age theorists remind us that the older we become, the more reflective and informed our learning decisions become (Trotter, 2006). Baxter Magolda and King (2004) report that "adult learning involves composing one's own reality in the context of one's relationships with others and the surrounding community." It is socially situated and requires reflection on past experience so as to re-construct one's place within a learning community. Professional learning initiatives, therefore, must allow participants to make connections between new learning and whatever prior knowledge and experiences they bring to it.

2.1. Learning Partnerships Model

One way to blend new learning with prior experience in professional development is through what Baxter Magolda and King (2004) call the Learning Partnerships Model. A result of a 17-year longitudinal study of adult development, the researchers found that knowledge is "complex and socially constructed." They found that one's identity plays a central role in crafting knowledge claims, and knowledge is mutually constructed via the sharing of expertise and authority (Baxter Magolda & King 2004). This theory of active and social learning relates directly to Dewey's theoretical claim that there is no such thing as genuine knowledge except as the "offspring of doing" (Dewey, 1966). "The analysis and arrangement of facts … cannot be obtained purely mentally - just inside the head. Men have to *do* something to the things when they wish to find out something; they have to alter conditions" (p. 275).

The Learning Partnerships Model encourages opportunities for collaborative activities in the process of constructing knowledge. Freire (1994) offers further support. "Knowledge is attained when people come together to exchange ideas, articulate their problems from their own perspectives and construct meanings that make sense to them. It is a process of inquiry and creation, an active and restless process that human beings undertake to make sense of themselves, the world and the relationship between the two"(p.61).

Social constructivist theory is embedded in the nature of any successful learning that involves interaction among adults. Creating a socially comfortable setting for our two participating teachers was very important to the success of the project. We wanted a partnership between two university professors and two middle school teachers to function as a merger of four professionals with one set of common goals. In this way, the role of professional development leader would be transcended to that of facilitator. Whereas a teacher gives a didactic lecture that covers the subject matter, a facilitator helps learners arrive at their own understanding of the content (DelleBovi, 2012). Wertsch (1997) reports that in professional development, the responsibility for learning resides increasingly with the learner. Effective professional development that involves outside consultants entering teachers' physical space must be based on this social theory.

It is important to note, however, that successful professional development cannot strictly be a social, collaborative activity in which learning occurs organically. Facilitators must provide appropriate scaffolding to foster the learning process. Borko and Putnam (2000) state, "Staff developers, like teachers, must negotiate their way between the learners' current thinking and the subject matter or content to be learned" (Borko & Putnam, 2000, p. 9). The idea that facilitators must "negotiate" between current knowledge and what is to be learned aligns with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD is the "range of tasks that a learner can perform with the help and guidance of others but cannot yet perform independently". Furthermore, Vygotsky argues that tasks placed within the zone of proximal development promote maximum cognitive development (Ormrod, 2011).

Because professional development requires sustained collaboration between participants and facilitators, early sessions should directly address the development of respectful and collegial relationships. Participants must feel trusted and valued. Academic Leadership Live defines successful professional development conditions as "a safe working environment that includes developing procedures for feedback, using protocols for productive dialogue and other norms to ensure respectful interaction" (Jones, J., Jones, K. Pickus & Ludwig, 2010, p.1).

Theorists offer several arguments in favor of collaborative learning. Mason (1972) argues that our very survival as a species depends on our educational system's ability to foster a new kind of nonhostile, noncompetitive personality in learners. The system should also encourage those attitudes that question traditional certainties and promote new relationships between authority and the larger group. According to Bruffee (1973), traditional pedagogical methods, such as lecturing and recitation, subtly teach the opposite values. Borko and Putnam (2000) state "The notion of distributed cognition suggests that when diverse groups of teachers with different types of knowledge and expertise come together in discourse communities, community members can draw upon and incorporate each other's expertise to create rich conversations and new insights into teaching and learning" (p.8). This collaborative and mutually beneficial learning became the benchmark of our work, from the earliest stages of the project when we met with the diocesan administrators.

3. Developing Partnerships

We began the project by asking three questions: (a) What content instruction do teachers need? (b) What learning theories drive such work? and (c) Who needs it? In determining the latter question first, we considered our university's mission and strategic plan that includes the goal of "becoming a leading advocate for the poorest in our neighboring community" (2011). To align our work with this goal and our university's strategic plan, we built a professional learning partnership with our city's diocese that is located in one of the most economically disadvantaged cities in the U.S. Our meetings with the Secretary of Catholic Education, the Assistant Superintendent for Assessment and Instruction, and the Director of Professional Development helped formulate the initial design of the professional learning model. We agreed that the most important area of professional development for teachers in the Diocese is in content instruction, and particularly for teachers who have not been involved in recent professional learning.

3.1. Literacy Instruction

We examined data on Diocesan students' underperforming abilities in literacy skills in grades 5-8. These discussions led to a collaborative decision to focus on literacy instruction in content classrooms at the intermediate level. As reported by the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (2010), extensive professional development in reading instruction and other areas that require sophisticated knowledge and skill is essential in maintaining high-quality instruction. Especially in economically disadvantaged schools, induction support such as this kind of professional development is essential, and yet they are often the schools with the lowest rates of participation (Wei, Darling-Hammond & Adamson, 2010).

We created an implementation model that includes eight parts: (a) an introduction that details the partnership - our university and the local Diocese; (b) a description of those whom the project serves; (c) an explanation of the content of the professional learning work and its demonstrated need; (d) a description of our university's unique position for such work, and how the project meets our university's mission and strategic goals; (e) the features of the project that are unique to existing professional development projects in the surrounding area; (f) the goals and objectives; (g)the anticipated outcomes and (h) a detailed timeline. The specific focus of the literacy instruction would be determined in collaboration with the participating teachers, just as this early stage of developing the project model was defined collaboratively with the Diocesan administrators.

3.2. Goals and Objectives for the Professional Development Project

We established the following goals and objectives:

(a) Goal: To create a program of interdisciplinary professional development for teachers in the Diocese that is unique to local institutions of higher education.
Objective: To develop and implement a one-year pilot program in which literacy instruction is used as one of the several content areas in which professional development occurs through partnering university professors and graduate student apprentices with Diocesan teachers.
(b) Goal: To improve teaching and learning of the participating teachers at a targeted school in the Diocese by providing instruction in their content areas in the form of partnership, mentoring and support, thereby carrying out the mission of the Catholic, Jesuit identity.
Objective: (a) To demonstrate positive movement toward improving instructional skills of those who teach underperforming students in reading for information and understanding and students underperforming abilities in reading for critical analysis; and
(b) To identify specific instructional methods and specific areas of teachers' knowledge base that have been added to or altered and are being utilized in classroom instruction as a direct result of this partnership project.
(c) Goal: To improve professional attitudes of the targeted Diocesan teachers by providing exciting and refreshing fellowship and mentoring.
Objective: To provide open discussion and focused instruction to Diocesan teachers in content and pedagogical knowledge and, in the process, strengthen teachers' confidence and identity in their classroom teaching.
(d) Goal: To improve the quality of the field experience component required of our university's graduate pre-service teachers.

Objective: To provide graduate students with one-on-one exposure to classroom teachers who are engaged in this professional learning initiative by creating and assigning them apprenticeships in which they assist university faculty and diocesan teachers, thereby providing them access to observing and working with young students in literacy instructional settings

3.3. The Instructors

My work as lead instructor was a direct result of my involvement with our college's Long Range Strategic Planning Committee. Chaired by our college president, a team of faculty and administrators were charged with developing a new mission statement and strategic plan. I aligned parts of this new plan with this project, including this language: "*…Embrace our city by elevating synergies in its academic research and service programs to respond to the needs of our urban area to contribute to their development and advocate for their citizens."*I conducted the project with one university teaching colleague - a retired high school English teacher with 35 years of teaching experience and 20 years as a valued adjunct instructor in English and literacy at our university.

3.4. The Participating School

Diocese administrators identified a regional elementary/intermediate school in an urban neighborhood where 3% of its 155 students are eligible for Title I services in the form of reading and mathematics instruction from our local urban school district. Forty-nine percent of its students are eligible for free or reduced lunch prices. Four of the 11 classroom teachers are permanently certified. One has temporary certification; four are either not certified or have lapsed temporary certifications. Two are teaching out of their content areas.

3.5. The Participating Teachers

We selected two teachers based on their level of interest and availability. Prior to the first session, they provided us with written responses to a few questions that offered insight into their professional lives (Appendix A). Jackson & Bruegmann (2009) found that peer learning among small groups of teachers is a powerful predictor of improved teacher effectiveness and student achievement. Our decision to work with such a small number was based on our need to closely examine teachers' professional lives, as well as to complete the project with tangible outcomes and recommendations for expanding to a larger and sustained initiative.

The two teachers: Eleanor has been teaching in the Diocese for 20 years. Her tenure has included English Language Arts instruction in grades 3, 4, 6, 7 and 8. She has also taught math, science, religion and health. Eleanor received her BA in French in 1978 and MS in Reading/Education in 1988. A former teaching fellow with the National Writing Project, she has attended professional presentations in English Language Arts instruction. In our early discussions, she expressed interest in examining content first and instructional approaches second, citing grammar, nonfiction reading comprehension, interdisciplinary instruction and standardized testing preparation.

Todd has taught in the Diocese for 23 years. He has a BA degree in Geography and state Certification in Social Studies, 7-12. He is currently working on an MA in Social Studies Education. Like Eleanor, Todd's teaching has included an array of subjects: social studies, science, religion, literature and health. He cited interdisciplinary approaches to teaching as an area in which he would welcome instruction and mentoring.

3.6. The Participating Graduate Apprentices

Our project included "graduate apprentice" positions - an alternative and innovative opportunity for teacher candidates to engage in instruction and professional learning. Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2008) reports that providing pre-service teachers opportunities to actively engage in classroom settings and work with seasoned teachers are among the characteristics found in teacher education programs that produce higher student achievement gains and greater retention in the first year of teaching (Berry, 2010). We selected three pre-service teachers based on their performance in the program and their level of maturity and commitment to teacher preparation in general.

The apprentice position allowed our participating teachers to be excused from their teaching while the apprentices conducted their classes. Their teaching experiences throughout the project provided premier learning contexts as they worked with adolescent learners and received personalized training and support from us. They often sat in on instructional sessions and witnessed first hand how partnering and mentoring work.

They taught in small and large group settings, developing skills in classroom management, and learned much about differentiated learning and instruction. An analysis of their experiences, as presented later in this article, yields positive results.

Another advantage of the apprentice position was that the participating teachers were given time to interact with our finest graduate students who were studying current issues in pedagogy and theory, differentiated learning and instruction, current trends in educational psychology and more. Further, the middle school students were challenged to adjust to various teaching styles our graduate apprentices used. The graduate apprentice position is a first of its kind in our university program and has received strong acknowledgment from our university colleagues. Self-reported data from the three apprentices provide significant evidence of positive learning experiences (Appendix B).

4. The Instruction

We conducted the professional learning in 10 sessions of 2.5 hours during a period of six months – a total of 25 instructional hours. Our meetings occurred at the diocesan school. Borko (2004) refers to "situative practice" to explain the rationale for conducting professional learning in participants' schools rather than at university campuses or other less familiar settings. "A central tenet of situational perspectives is that the contexts and activities in which people learn become a fundamental part of what they learn" (p. 7). Our sessions typically began with Eleanor and Todd reviewing lesson plans and giving instructional support to the graduate apprentices. We spent the first two sessions getting to know one another, developing a strong mutual respect for each other and for the project, and working toward those goals of collaborative learning. We did so from three perspectives – university professors, participating teachers and graduate apprentices. We solicited written responses from Todd and Eleanor that contributed to the project's focus (Appendix C). As data demonstrate, this collaborative strategy was useful to these teachers after the project was completed and when they pursued similar work with one another and their teaching colleagues.

After the first two sessions, we arrived at two content areas Eleanor and Todd wanted to pursue for their teaching of seventh and eighth graders: state test preparation and interdisciplinary approaches to teaching and learning. Focusing on English Language Arts and Social Studies, we arrived at two goals: (a) develop a stronger understanding for how to integrate state test preparation instruction without disrupting established curricula, and (b) create a model unit of interdisciplinary study for their current curricula in English Language Arts and Social Studies to use as a model for other interdisciplinary teaching. Both goals were derived from their current teaching and both were fixed topics in the state curricula. Gabriel (2010) argues that professional development should be responsive to the needs, interests, awareness and commitment of individual teachers. We were pleased with this focus.

Rich discussions resulted. Eleanor and Todd taught us as much about how middle school teachers approach their work as we taught them about innovative aspects of teaching in their disciplines. As Todd put it, "The project offered a valuable opportunity for teachers to develop curriculum for immediate classroom instruction." Pistoe and Maila (2012) found that teachers are more likely to change their instructional practices and gain greater subject knowledge and improved teaching skills when their professional development is directly linked to their daily experience, as well as aligned with standards and assessments.

Our discussions of test preparation instruction resulted in useful lessons for Eleanor and Todd, as articulated in their responses to our protocol. Collaboratively, we constructed a list of those skills students are required to demonstrate on state tests that they could use to juxtapose the skills addressed in their respective curricula. We led them to their own understanding of how tracking skills can help prevent compromising their curriculum; We examined their current teaching activities and assignments that directly address these state-mandated skills and led them to a secure understanding of the close connection between their curricula and these tests. We looked at teaching strategies such as previewing a reading passage, identifying genres, themes and main ideas, and using word recognition strategies to help with vocabulary as examples of how their instruction addresses the content of state tests. Our sessions led them to a firm understanding of this juxtaposition; they were motivated to continue defining these patterns between the school's established curriculum and the content of state exams.

Our sessions on interdisciplinary instruction culminated in a four-week unit we called "The Wild West." Each year during the spring, eighth grade students study the transcontinental period in American history while reading and discussing literature from that era in Eleanor's English language arts class. In June, at the end of this unit, the students mount a pageant called "Wild West Day." The students dress in Wild West garb and perform skits and readings; they sing songs from the period and tell "tall tales" discovered in English class. The school's music and art teachers participate as well, and some parents attend the production. Though Todd is the main instigator for "Wild West Day," Eleanor welcomed the opportunity this year to develop an interdisciplinary approach, aligning her language arts activities more closely with the topics Todd was covering in his social studies class. Prior to the project, Eleanor and Todd had been aware of the potential their respective curricula offered for interdisciplinary instruction, and were somewhat aware that new state-mandated standards encouraged it, but they lacked the planning time and strategies needed to make cooperative efforts happen.

5. Results and Analysis: Outcomes of the Pilot Project

The implementation and outcomes of this project serve us now as the tenets for future work in teacher learning initiatives. The outcomes of the project include:

- Our university faculty developed a formal partnership with the local Catholic Diocese to blend resources and meet joint goals. This partnership included professional consultation with Diocesan personnel, including the Secretary for Education, Professional Development Coordinator, and Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment.
- An implementation model was created for effective content-specific professional development for teachers at a school where 24% of its students are eligible for Title I Services in the form of reading and mathematics instruction from their neighboring city school district, a strong indicator of high risk economic and academic conditions.
- Effective instruction in skills-based learning and interdisciplinary approaches to teaching was delivered to two teachers in social studies and literature, grades 7 and 8. Self-reported data from the teachers demonstrate positive responses to instruction in content-specific teaching skills, the opportunity to collaborate and construct ideas, and observe and collaborate with graduate pre-service teachers (Appendix C).
- An advanced form of field experience for pre-service teachers was created. A cohort of graduate apprentices was trained to provide targeted standards-based supplemental instruction in Grades 7 and 8 in literature, science and social studies. Their self-reported data demonstrate their learning in this clinical experience and their development of both content and delivery system skills. (Appendix B).
- Self-reported data provide insight into the seventh and eighth grade students at this low-income school who benefited from the graduate apprentices' instruction in science and literature. Their written reflections, as presented in the Analysis section below, include their observations of the apprentices' ability to control class, keep them interested, explain material in a simple way and make learning fun.

5.1. Analysis of Self-Reported Data from Participating Teacher

Eleanor and Todd provide data that demonstrate the effectiveness of the project as stated in the third outcome (Appendix D). Of the protocol's five questions, responses to two have a direct impact on the quality of the instruction. The first, "*Can you cite any adjustments to your teaching as a direct result of your participation in this project?*" yielded rich responses. Todd reported that he better understands the role of literacy in his students' content learning and that he intends to collaborate with English Language Arts teachers, and particularly with Eleanor as a result of this project. "My students' learning revolves around literacy skills." "Too often," he reported, "teachers isolate themselves. They close their classroom doors and enter their own worlds of science or history; this is not the best way to approach a child's education."

Eleanor recognized the value of exposing her students to more nonfiction prose, a result of the "Wild West" interdisciplinary work with Todd's history curriculum. "There are so many ways I can now approach nonfiction in ELA instruction that I hadn't considered before our work on this unit." Follow up data collected five months after the completion of the project demonstrate specific ways in which Eleanor and Todd have adjusted their teaching. Eleanor reports that her students are using graphic organizers like Venn diagrams, webs and timelines more effectively in their work with nonfiction reading comprehension. She also reports a stronger sense of how to engage state test preparation instruction without it altering her curriculum.

A second question, "*If you were to continue participating in professional development, what instructional areas would you prefer to examine?*" yields data that demonstrate the project's application to future teaching. Todd's response echoes his earlier comment about recognizing the role of literacy skills instruction in content courses; he reports his interest in completing a course in literacy instruction as a part of his Master's Degree course work. This was a strong endorsement of our project, particularly given its pilot status. Eleanor reports her plans for focusing on reading and writing skills, along with "*understanding and implementing the New Common Core Standards*", this a result of her work with instruction in state test preparation. For Eleanor, it is not only about implementing, rather, understanding – a level of her reflection that surfaced throughout this experience. These and other responses Todd and Eleanor offered to this protocol yield significant perspectives on today's teaching.

5.2. Analysis of the Graduate Apprentices and Self-Reported Data

As stated in the fourth outcome, the Graduate Apprentice position is a newly adopted clinical experience for our teacher education program. In their study of effective alternative teacher certification programs, Humphrey and Wechsler (2008) report that mentoring activities for pre-service teachers are among the most valuable experiences in teacher training. They cite collaborative lesson planning, talking with teachers about the strengths and needs of specific students and being provided curriculum materials as significant to their preparation.

The graduate apprenticeship was one of the most effective aspects of the project. It serves us now as a strong testimony of how balanced a partnership can be. As we offered our instruction to Eleanor and Todd, they provided our pre-service teachers with a context for rich teaching practice and observation. They listened to Eleanor and Todd describe their teaching and they offered their own insight by referring to their course work and other university learning. In this way, they became active participants of the instructional sessions. Their specific responses to our protocol of questions demonstrate these positive experiences (Appendix B).

5.3. Analysis and Self-Reported Data of the Seventh and Eighth Grade Students

Seventh and eighth grade students' written responses yield positive results of our graduate apprentices' teaching. Of Jillian's science teaching, Emily writes: "*I enjoyed the lesson I had with Ms. Parker. She was strict, just like teachers should be. She got out what she was trying to say in an understanding manner. She did what she was asked to do and was very smart in her knowledge of Science. Science is a fun class!*"

Tony writes: "*Ms. Letchworth was very good at teaching our class. She kept our class under control, answered our questions, and was really nice to us. There really wasn't anything bad about her, except she had some trouble with velocity but we helped her. All in all I feel that she is a very great teacher.*" And of Rebecca's teaching and involvement in the Project, "*Ms. Lyons is a very good teacher! When we are with her she explains things well and I know exactly what to do. I enjoy having her here. Today we talked about discrimination and stereotypes. She talked with us about our thoughts and our feelings and I can't wait to have her back again! I am glad they picked our school to do this program. It is an honor to have her here!*" There was also opportunity for the eighth graders to ask the graduate apprentices about high school. Both these students and our apprentices learned from one another in this context.

6. Discussion/Implications

When the U.S. government announced priorities in its Race to the Top competition for states' funding under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, most assumed that new and innovative professional learning opportunities for teachers would naturally follow. In areas that are not economically challenged, this is occurring, but for those school districts that cannot afford the resources for professional training, the "race" has created significant pressure for teachers. As Wei, et al. (2010) report, "Without a strategic investment in high quality professional development, it is unlikely that any effort to improve teacher effectiveness or to turnaround low-performing schools will succeed" (p. 36). This project provides an implementation model, theoretical framework and specific outcomes for professional learning that can be used in both small and large-scale projects.

Wei, et al. (2010) report that for professional development to have a significant impact on teaching practice and student learning, it needs to be (a) intensive; (b) sustained over time; (c) embedded in teacher's day-to-day work in schools; (d) related directly with teachers' work with students; (e) focused on engaging teachers in active content learning; (f) related to district policies for curriculum; and (g) structured to regularly engage teachers in local professional learning communities where problems of practice are solved through collaboration(p.38).

Our work with Eleanor and Todd fulfills all but the second goal. We need to continue to support Eleanor and Todd as they continue to implement the instruction we offered and the knowledge they gained from their excellent participation. They, like all teachers, need an audience that cares to listen and guide.

The partnerships that resulted from this study now serve as the basis for a sustained university professional learning program that will address instructional needs in our neighboring community and carry out our university's mission and strategic plan. Darling-Hammond (2011) reports "In European, Asian and other high achieving nations, teachers have 15-25 hours a week for collaboration plus 100 hours for professional learning. They engage regularly in lesson study, action research and peer observation and coaching to evaluate and improve practice." (Darling-Hammond, 2011) Our teachers must be provided these same opportunities.

There is significant speculation about the usefulness of professional development projects that do not demonstrate improvement in student achievement. No doubt, improving our students' skills and life long learning is our educational system's ultimate goal. This study's findings demonstrate that teachers can benefit from small-scale mentoring and instruction in order to affect change in their classroom teaching. Fishman, Marx, Best and Tal (2003) argue, "...a chief objective of professional development should be to foster changes in teachers' knowledge, beliefs and attitudes, because these components of teaching cognition show a strong correlation to teachers' classroom practices" (Fishman, Marx, Best and Tal 2003, p.4). Further, the project offers data in the form of "opinionnaires" – teachers' self-reported responses to their involvement. No doubt a broader range of data is needed to assess the worth of professional development projects like this one; for the purposes of this project as a first-year project that tested an implementation model and theoretical framework, this data serves as an initial measure of its effectiveness.

Acknowledgments

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Appendix A

An Immersion Initiative of College Professors, Graduate Students and Diocesan Teachers in Partnership

Needs Assessment: Your responses to these questions will help us prepare a useful professional development experience for you. Provide as much information as you prefer.

Please save this as a Word doc and record your answers under each question.

1. How many years have you been a teacher?

2. What subjects and grade levels have you taught, and for how long?

3. Have you taught in other places than your current school? Describe here.

4. Describe your academic background: degree(s) dates conferred, majors, concentrations, and any other information you wish to share about your training as a teacher.

5. Comment on what led you to choose the content area(s) you teach.

6. Within each content area you teach, what are your favorite topics?

7. Of these favorite topics, is there a difference between what your "favorites" are and what you prefer to teach? If so, comment here.

8. What topics within your content areas are most challenging to teach? Why?

9. List any topics you feel you have had particular success teaching. Comment on this success.

10. Likewise, list and describe any topics you see problematic for you when teaching them to your students. Offer as much commentary as you wish.

11. Given what you understand this Professional Development will offer, share whatever information you prefer that can offer us a stronger sense of what you would like to change in your teaching of.

12. The emphasis of our work will be on content-specific instruction. List any areas you would like to focus on.

Appendix B

An Immersion Initiative of College Professors, Graduate Students and Diocesan Teachers in Partnership

Graduate Apprentices

This is a data protocol that will serve to illustrate some outcomes of the pilot project and your participation in it. Please offer your prose responses to each question in as much detail as you can.

Please type your responses, using 12-point and bold, directly under each question below here and then send this on as a Word attachment.

1. In as much detail as you can recall, describe your understanding of the purpose of the professional development project.

2. In as much detail as you can offer, describe your understanding of your participation as "graduate apprentice" in the year-one pilot project. What did you do, how did you serve the project, etc.

3. Specifically, what did you learn from this project? Consider the two contexts, one at a time – the classroom instruction and your observations of the teacher team.

4. What did this project do to add to your professional growth as a preservice teacher? Be as specific as you can.

5. Do you have any other responses to your participation

Of one interdisciplinary teaching experience, Melissa offered this observation:

"During each English class, it wasn't enough to just have the students read the material and then write responses. We had to teach the students about the concepts they were learning. For example, the students were reading a book about discrimination in the South. Many couldn't relate to the book until I told them that there was a time when women were discriminated against. All of the kids were shocked. They started to compose essays that discussed why they felt discrimination was so terrible and took more value in the lessons from the book."

Of how this opportunity supplemented her regular field experience hours, Rebecca offered this: "*Our regular pre-service hours are done under supervision. As a graduate apprentice, I had the opportunity to teach in a classroom without any teachers there to save me. The teachers gave us guidelines for our lessons, but we carried out the lessons ourselves. I had to learn to improvise, manage students, set rules and differentiate instruction. This opportunity gave me a strong sense of how I will be in my own classroom. I felt more comfortable trying different approaches because I was not afraid of making mistakes."*

Rebecca further reflected: "*This project gave me a sense of the reality of the teaching profession. I was able to see the real challenges that arise in the profession and witness a team working through solutions. The teachers were able to get valuable professional development time that they are otherwise not exposed to, and the graduate students were able to grow as teacher candidates and explore their unique teaching styles while witnessing teamwork amongst teachers."*

Appendix C

An Immersion Initiative of College Professors, Graduate Apprentices and Diocesan Teachers in Partnership:

English Language Arts

When we think about our teaching, we usually think of the "what" and the "how." In order to arrive at an instructional plan for our PD project, it is best to begin with how you would like to spend time working with us – in particular, content areas that you would like to focus on.

We want to offer you the opportunity to share and discuss your teaching experiences, and present useful instruction related to your content area; we'd like to base this instruction on your immediate needs. We are open to helping you arrive at these needs.

To guide you in this reflective work, consider this:

Begin by breaking this task into two areas:

(1) the "what" or content/curriculum
(2) the "how" or teaching methods, pedagogy, delivery systems.

Once you've done this, break the task into the instructional areas of ELA that you teach:

    (1) Literature Instruction: fiction, nonfiction, poetry, etc.
    (2) Writing Instruction: grammar and mechanics, paragraphing, essay writing
    (3) Vocabulary Instruction
    (4) Reading comprehension skills: lower order vs. higher order skills
    (5) Critical thinking skills
    (6) Other:

For each applicable area, write a few sentences that describe your interests; this is a great way to begin the act of reflective thought. Teachers rarely have time for this kind of reflection. It can not only lead to a wonderful sense of calm, but it opens avenues for new and innovative teaching.

We will use this work as a point of departure to begin our mentoring project.

An Immersion Initiative of College Professors, Graduate Apprentices and Diocesan Teachers in Partnership:

Social Studies

When we think about our teaching, we usually think of the "what" and the "how." In order to arrive at an instructional plan for our PD project, it is best to begin with how you would like to spend time working with us – in particular, content areas that you would like to focus on.

We want to offer you the opportunity to share and discuss your teaching experiences, and present useful instruction related to your content area; we'd like to base this instruction on your immediate needs. We are open to helping you arrive at these needs.

To guide you in this reflective work, consider this:

Begin by breaking this task into two areas:

(1) the "what" or content/curriculum
(2) the "how" or teaching methods, pedagogy, delivery systems.

Once you've done this, break the task into the instructional areas of your teaching – those that define your curriculum.

For each applicable area, write a few sentences that describe your interests; this is a great way to begin the act of reflective thought. Teachers rarely have time for this kind of reflection. It can not only lead to a wonderful sense of calm, but it opens avenues for new and innovative teaching.
We will use this work as a point of departure to begin our mentoring project.

Appendix D

An Immersion Initiative of Professors, Graduate Students and Diocesan Teachers in Partnership:

Outcomes Report

1. Before responding specifically to your experience with this project, please offer your insight into professional development for teachers in general.

2. What has been your understanding of the purpose of this Professional Development project as it was presented to you in the first session?

3. Can you cite any adjustments to your teaching as a direct result of your participation in this project?

4. If you were to continue participating in a professional development initiative, what instructional areas would you prefer to examine?

5. For the continuation of this kind of professional development, what suggestions can you offer that would improve on the experience you had this year? Provide both the good, the bad and the ugly.

   a. The amount of time spent with project faculty:

   b. The substance of instruction/mentoring:

   c. The ways meetings were facilitated:

   d. Graduate apprentices' roles: