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**SUSTAINING CHANGE THROUGH INQUIRY-BASED
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT****Abstract:**

This study was based on a series of professional development workshops held over a two-year period with the entire complement of history and social studies teachers (n = 53) in a large mid-western school district in the United States. The primary purpose of this study was to discover which factors were perceived to be most powerful in contributing to the sustainability of district-wide change. The workshops offered a practical guide to help teachers understand the tenets of constructivism; presented a compelling argument for why an inquiry-based pedagogy is more powerful than are traditional models of social studies instruction; modeled constructivist approaches for the classroom; and guided teachers through the design, development, implementation, and analysis of constructivist teaching practices.

Informal contact with administrators 2 years after the completion of the professional development workshops revealed that their teachers were continuing to engage in constructivist teaching practice. This led, naturally, to questions about which factors were contributing to this positive outcome. The primary objective of this study was to examine teacher and administrator perceptions regarding the features, in the view of teachers, that were most powerful in contributing to the sustainability of district-wide change with respect to constructivist teaching practice.

As numerous authors have documented (e.g., Canestrari & Marlowe, 2012; Page & Marlowe, 2000; Schwahn & Spady, 1998) there are significant obstacles to sustaining systemic change over time within school districts, particularly when teachers lack opportunities to influence the substance, direction, and pace of that change. Unfortunately, many districts view professional development as an opportunity to communicate top-down mandates to teachers, despite a vast literature underscoring the futility of this approach (see for example, Hohenbrink, J., Johnston, M., & Westhoven, L., 1997; Marlowe & Page, 2005).

Our data, collected over a four-year period, reveals that sustained change is likely when professional development is intentionally designed to: support teacher learning in safe, non-evaluative environments; promote teacher autonomy; encourage teachers to assume leadership roles in curricular and instructional matters; provide opportunities for teachers to share their practice with their colleagues; and foster collaborative relationships between teachers and school administrators.

Keywords:

inquiry, constructivism, professional development