BRUCE MARLOWE
Roger Williams University, USA

ALAN CANESTRARI
Roger Williams University, USA

MARILYN PAGE
Independent Consultant, USA

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.

Consistent with much of the literature (e.g., Musanti & Pence, 2010; Slater, 2008; Lieberman & Miller, 2005; Blase & Blase, 2004; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995), these specific themes emerged from the data:

With remarkable frequency teachers used words like "safety" and "non-threatening" in their reflections and surveys to describe their view that change in their own individual case was more likely to be sustained when experimentation with instructional formats is allowed to take place in a non-evaluative context.

A second consistent theme was teacher reports of feeling empowered to make change without first seeking approval and many more reported feeling greater autonomy about both large (e.g., instructional formats) and small (e.g., seating arrangements) classroom issues during and after the workshops.

Teachers consistently reported feeling encouraged to assume leadership roles in curricular and instructional matters, whether or not they were department chairs or recognized as instructional leaders prior to the workshops.

References

Bass, E. & Allender, J. (2001). A critical theorist and a humanistic educator dialogue about empowering student voices. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing, 17*(3), 101-109.

Bass, L., Anderson-Patten, V., & Allender, J. (2002). Self-study as a way of teaching and learning: A research collaborative re-analysis of self-study teaching portfolios. In J. Loughran, (Ed.), *Improving Teacher Education Practice through self-study,* (pp. 56-70). London: Routledge/Falmer.

Barton, K.C. & Levstik, L.S. (2004). *Teaching history for the common good*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Brooks, M. & Brooks, J. (1999). *In search of understanding: A case for the constructivist classroom*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Alexandria, VA.

Bertaux, D. (1981). *Life stories.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication.

Blase, J. & Blase, J. (2004). *Handbook of Instructional Leadership: How Successful Principals Promote Teaching and Learning* (2nd. Ed. Paperback). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Canestrari, A.S. & Marlowe, B.A. (2012). The holy curiosity of inquiry: Teacher perspectives on transforming instruction from traditional to constructivist pedagogy. *American Educational Research Association (AERA),* Vancouver, British Columbia.

Canestrari, A. (2005). Beyond rote-memorization: Engaging students in geographic inquiry. In Audet, R. & Jordan, L. (2005). *Integrating inquiry across the curriculum*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.

Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Darling-Hammond, L., & McLaughlin, M. (1995). Policies that support professional development in an era of reform. *Phi Delta Kappan, 76*(8), 597-604.

Foote. C., Vermette, P. & Battaglia, C. (2001). *Constructivist strategies: Meeting standards and engaging adolescent minds*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

Giroux, Henry. (1988). *Teachers as intellectuals: Toward a critical pedagogy of learning.* Westport, CN: Greenwood Press.

Hohenbrink, J., Johnston, M., & Westhoven, L. (1997). Collaborative teaching of a

social studies methods course: Intimidation and change. *Journal of Teacher Education, 48*(4), 293-300.

Kohn, A. (1999). *The schools our children deserve*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

LaBoskey, V. K., Davies-Samway, K., & Garcia, S. (1998). Cross-institutional action research: A collaborative self-study. In M. L. Hamilton et al. (Eds.) *Reconceptualizing teaching practice: Self study in teacher education* (pp.154-166). London: Falmer Press.

Lambert, L. (2002). *The constructivist leader, 2nd Edition*. New York: Teacher's College Press.

Kozol, J. (2007). *Letters to a young teacher*. New York: Three Rivers Press.

Levstik, L.S. & Barton, K.C. (2005). *Doing history: Investigating with children in elementary and middle schools*. Mahwah, NY: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Marlowe, B. & Page, M. (2005). *Creating and sustaining the constructivist classroom*, *2nd Edition*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press Inc.

Musanti, S. & Pence, L. (2010). Collaboration and teacher development: Unpacking resistance, constructing knowledge and navigating identiti*es. Teacher Education Quarterly*, 37(1), 73-89

Ohanian, S. (1985). On stir and serve recipes for teaching. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *vol.(66)*10 pp. 696-701.

Page, M.L. & Marlowe, B.A. (2000). Battered teacher syndrome: Using standards implementation as a weapon. *Education Week*, 20 (15), 43, 46.

Rothschild, T. (2011). Personal communication.

Schwahn, C., & Spady, W. (1998). Why change doesn't happen and how to make sure it d*oes. Educational Leadershi*p, 55(7), 45-47.

Slater, L. (2008). Pathways to building leadership cap*acity, Educational Management, Administration and Leaders*hip, 36 (1), 55-69.

von Glasersfeld, E. (1995). *Radical constructivism: A way of knowing and learning*. London: Falmer Press.