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A Case Study of Teacher Reflection: Examining Teacher Participation in a Video-based Professional Learning Community

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ABSTRACT: Professional learning communities (PLCs) constitute worthwhile spaces in which to study teacher participation in the reflective practices that have potential to shift their teaching. This qualitative case study details the interactions between dual-language and ELL teachers in a grade-level PLC as they met together to confer over video-clips of their literacy instruction. The group aimed to extend their learning about balanced literacy practices as part of a larger, whole-school professional development effort. Sociocultural learning theory constitutes the theoretical perspective informing this study, allowing for an examination of teachers' diverse ways of meaning making. Qualitative methods of data collection, including interviews, videos of teachers' instruction, and transcripts of PLC conversations comprised the data set. Constructed narrative vignettes of teachers' talk and meaning-making demonstrate how the group asked questions emerging out of their practice, discussed specific ways to meet students' needs, and shared advice on how to navigate the technical aspects of teaching. This study revealed that video-based reflection offered significant opportunities for teachers to reflect on and revise their teaching practices.

Keywords: video-based reflection, professional development, teacher learning

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Three fifth-grade teachers, one student teacher, and two university researchers gather around a laptop perched on a pod of student desks. We sit in a fifth-grade classroom. The first teacher elaborates on a video clip of her literacy instruction. It is a mini-lesson on inferring that she conducted with her English-language learners the previous week.

"I used the mini-lesson model they gave us during our last professional development meeting, and the kids really got it. First, I modeled my own inferences through a think-aloud. I was able to move to just giving them a clue, and then my students made inferences from those clues. At one point in the story, when I read aloud about a boy dipping a girl's braids in an inkwell, we stopped and discussed it and most of the students inferred that he was a bully, but another student said,
'Well, I think maybe he had a crush on her, because when I was in third grade, we boys would be mean to girls we liked.'"

She laughs at the memory of this student's comment and continues, "But that led us into a really wonderful conversation, and it reminded me to say that even though different readers make different inferences, good readers still pay close attention to the text to confirm or modify those inferences as they continue to read."

In this vignette, it is evident how this teacher reflected on the social construction of bullying and scaffolded students' efforts to make inferences from text. Her reflective words on the video clip of her teaching indicates how she was participating in the challenging work of collaborative reflection. These teachers were taking time out of their extensive responsibilities to slow down the moments of their day, examine the details of their work, and support one another's development as educators and learners (Dewey, 1933; Rodgers, 2002a). Close examinations of the teachers' reflective work such as the example in this case study contribute nuanced understandings as to how teacher reflection takes place (Jay & Johnson, 2002) and what is required of successful professional learning communities that make their practice public (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2010).

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have proliferated in the past decade, yet educational leaders still wonder how best to effectively support teacher growth (Clark & Florio-Ruane, 2001), particularly with regards to community development (Hairon, Goh, Chua, & Wang, 2015) and video-based reflection (Sherin & Han, 2004). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine what happened within a 5th-grade team who participated in a video-based PLC focused on balanced literacy. This investigation illuminates how diverse teacher needs were supported in this particular learning community, how teachers learned together, and how they built community. The study also inquires into how video-based reflection can support teachers in enacting new instructional practices and effectively promote student learning. These fifth-grade teachers volunteered to participate in this PLC to support their own learning in a whole-school professional development effort focused on balanced literacy. This group of teachers exemplified active inquiry for the purpose of collaborative growth. The key research question informing this study was, "What kind of participation and teacher reflection are evident in a video-based Professional Learning Community?" The literature review that follows outlines what is known about PLCs and teacher reflection, particularly video-based reflection.

Literature Review

Johnston-Parsons (2010) discusses the complexities involved in collaborative endeavors, synthesizing living with tensions and dialogue as two elements of effective collaboration and learning. The study under examination in this paper inquired into the tensions, or the networked aspects of a situation, that do not allow for either/or decisions. It also examined the dialogue that emerged in a PLC when a grade-level team met together around issues and questions emerging from their literacy instruction practices. This literature review discusses the research informing this study, which constitute an intersection between PLCs and teacher reflection,

with a particular emphasis on video-based professional development.

Professional Learning Communities

Well-designed professional development can have an impact on teacher practice and learning, especially in the context of professional learning communities (Cochran-Smith, 2001; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, 2009; Morrissey, 2000). In their review of the research, Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) describe effective professional development as "intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice; focused on the teaching and learning of specific academic content…connected to other school initiatives; and [focused on] building strong working relationships among teachers" (p. 43). These collaborative qualities of professional development are valued within PLCs but often unpracticed (Johnston-Parsons, 2010).

Effective professional development (PD) models synchronize with teachers' questions and the contexts of their classrooms (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Steeg & Lambson, 2015). PLCs formed around teachers' chosen goals provide quality opportunities for them to discuss questions emerging from their practice with others who are intimately familiar with their contexts and teaching situations (Egawa, 2009; Reitano & Sim, 2010). Research on PLCs suggests that many other benefits are possible for teachers who participate in these communities, including an enhanced understanding of professional development content (Hord, 1997), increased learning about what constitutes good teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1996), and reduced feelings of isolation (Egawa, 2009; Hord, 1997). PLCs constitute a collaborative learning space, making it possible for teachers to access new information, clarify their beliefs and ideas, and reflect on their practice (Blumenfeld, Marx, Kracjik, & Soloway, 1996). Additionally, these spaces enable teachers to gain emotional support for the risks and struggle embedded in the process of incorporating new learning into existing teaching practices. In short, PLCs can support teachers in building a community framework that enhances their commitment to a shared vision for inquiry, instruction, and learning (Nelson, Slavit, Perkins, & Hathorn, 2008).

Hairon et al. (2015) call for a view of PLCs as a multi-dimensional idea comprised of "professional," "learning," and "community," whereby the construct of PLC can be both challenged and further defined. Shared vision and values, responsibility, reflective inquiry, collaboration, learning, trust and respect are characteristics of effective PLCs that contribute to the community aspects of learning together. These qualities take time to develop; Lord (1994) speaks of "critical colleagueship" (p. 184) whereby teachers support one another in changing their practice. All of these aspects contribute to PLC success, but hinge on the quality and depth of teachers' capacity for reflection.

Teacher Reflection

Teacher reflection is a theoretical notion that is readily accepted in the literature as one of the most significant ways teachers examine and change their professional selves and their practice (Colton & Sparks-Langer, 1993; Dewey, 1933; Jay & Johnson, 2002; Rodgers, 2002a; Schön, 1983, 1991; Urzúa & Vásquez, 2008). Reflection is a descriptive, rather than a prescriptive notion (Clara, 2014), providing clarity to situations that initially appear unclear. Schön's (1983, 1991) concepts of reflection *in* action and reflection *on* action contextualize teachers' talk and learning in the action of their classrooms, constituting the sociocultural contexts of their learning. Urzúa & Vásquez (2008) further discuss reflection for action, where teachers' reflection on future practice, as evidenced in their planning-talk, informs their future ways of being. Zeichner (1994a, 1994b) has contributed significantly to the field of teacher reflection, in his advocacy for teacher

reflection that considers the social, moral, and political aspects of teaching. From Zeichner's perspective, teachers should not just reflect in general, but should have specific content or ideas upon which to reflect. Jay and Johnson (2002) phrase it this way: "reflective teaching entails a recognition, examination, and rumination over the implications of one's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, knowledge, and values, as well as the opportunities and constraints provided by the social conditions in which the teacher works" (p. 20). PLCs that effectively support teacher reflection make room for the particular experiences emerging from teachers' classrooms, and demand an exploration of the social and cultural contexts which afford opportunities in the learning process.

Video-based Reflection

Reflection is an interchange between observation and interpretation (Clara, 2014), yet it is difficult for teachers to observe themselves and reflect within the action of teaching (van Manen, 1995). Herein lies the benefits of video-based reflections on teaching and learning. Video enables teachers to watch complex classroom interactions from multiple perspectives. When groups of teachers engage together around video, they can share different interpretations (van Es & Sherin, 2010; van Es, Tunney, Goldsmith, & Seago, 2014).

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Reitano and Sim (2010) discuss the value of video to promote reflective practices among teachers who are increasingly pressured to meet standards in an era of accountability. It is infeasible to interview teachers in order to reconstruct the events of a lesson or the qualities of a teaching context, whereas video enables a teacher to relive the elements of a teaching scenario and verbalize previously unarticulated ideas about teaching.

van Es et al. (2014) offer a framework for facilitation around video-based teaching episodes, highlighting the importance of facilitators contextualizing a clip to orient teachers to the work of analysis. Similarly important was the idea of maintaining an inquiry stance and fostering collaboration among group members (p. 348). When facilitated well, video clubs, such as those used in a PLC setting, can be an avenue for teachers to develop an interpretive stance toward their instruction and more carefully attend to student learning (van Es & Sherin, 2010; Reitano & Sim, 2010).

Guiding Theory: Sociocultural Learning Theory

Sociocultural learning theory values talk as a significant tool in mediating new understandings (Vygotsky, 1978). It recognizes and values that teachers' growth emerges out of the social contexts which surround and inform their thinking, even when they are alone. It makes space to examine where the institutional, interpersonal, and individual planes of influence affect teachers' learning and practice (Rogoff, 2003). From this perspective, scaffolding is a practice whereby more knowledgeable individuals support the learning of others in ways that open the learner up, rather than close the learner down. Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development supports the idea that learners operate in zones of capacity that are individual to them; at a certain point, a person scaffolds a learning experience to enable a learner to reach new levels of understanding and ability. Sociocultural perspectives on learning emphasize the social nature of this learning process. In this study, collaborative learning encompassed the shared experience of reflecting and rehearsing one's teaching aloud and inviting other perspectives into

what is often the individual and isolated work of teaching.

Sociocultural theory as a mental model was appropriate for this study because it provided for an examination of the complex factors influencing the issues teachers self-identified in their own literacy instruction. It recognizes not only the broader context of a district and school, but the personal and professional experiences a teacher brings to bear on his or her instruction. An explanation of the term "tension" as it is used in this study is relevant here. Johnston-Parson (2010) explained that, "living in tension is a process. It does not result in permanent solutions but requires constant attention and readjustment . . . a sense of continuity and a willingness to change" (p. 289). From a sociocultural perspective, tensions are the points at which a teacher recognizes the potential for change compared to the socially constructed ideals of new learning. It is at these points of tension that a teacher must attend and adjust in order to change their original thinking, assimilate new ways of being, and move forward successfully.

Balanced Literacy

One additional construct relevant to this study was that of balanced literacy. There are myriad definitions and understandings of balanced literacy. In this particular school context, balanced literacy encompassed an emphasis on literature-rich, meaning-centered literacy events. Reading and writing workshop were key elements of the balanced literacy framework practiced by the teachers in this research, which meant they studied and practiced structures such as guided reading, shared reading, individual reading conferences, read-aloud, mini-lessons, and independent reading (Taberski, 2011; Routman, 2003). These literacy structures constituted the shared sociocultural environment in which teachers instructed students. The whole-school professional development taking place at the time of this study emphasized miscue analysis (Goodman, 1995) as a means to understanding students' constructions of literacy, student-study, literature study, and strategic use of literacy curriculum to provide holistic and authentic encounters with authors and literary elements (Spiegel, 1998; Weaver, 1998). These topics constituted the professional development offered to all teachers at this school. Each of these elements was also evident in the fifth-grade teachers' classrooms who participated in the PLC that is at the heart of this study.

Methods

This qualitative case study (Stake, 1995) examined the kinds of participation and teacher reflection evident in a video-based Professional Learning Community. Case study was an appropriate methodology for uncovering and explicating the meaning and action of social learning (Erickson, 1986) that took place for this grade level team. Teachers' participation in this particular PLC constituted an intrinsic case (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995) compelling a close look at the characteristics of these teachers' participation. The research question informing this study was, "What kind of participation and teacher reflection are evident in a video-based Professional Learning Community?" In the following section, I offer a description of the school in which this research took place, contextualize the study with a brief explanation of the larger research work out of which this study emerged, explain the PLC meeting format, and share the methodological details of this study.

Setting

The environment for this study highlights the school's position as a rare schooling environment in the midst of an educational system influenced by restrictive language policies and a traditional emphasis on schooling. Hidalgo School for the Arts (pseudonyms are used for all locations and participants) was located in a major school district

in the southwestern U.S. It ran a Fine Arts and Dual Language program with the goal of helping students achieve high performance in core content areas, language acquisition and the arts. The school's administration, teachers, and parent communities worked to maintain their dual language program and justify a balanced literacy approach in their district. This district, along with others in this particular metropolitan area, was operating under language policy restrictions that prohibited first language support with mandated Structured English Immersion (SEI) and Reading First programs. The fact that this school continued its dual language program and balanced literacy efforts within the restrictive educational and political climate was evidence of the teachers' and administrators' commitment to an exceptional school context. Most of the school's neighborhood students were Latino and many were English language learners. Table 1 provides an overview of Hidalgo's demographics.

Table 1. Hidalgo Demographics

Hidalgo demographics during the 2008-2009 school year	
Total number of students	756
Percentage of Latino students	94%
Percentage of African American students	3%
Percentage of Caucasian students	3%
Total percentage of students on free/reduced lunch	92.4%

The emphasis on balanced literacy in this particular school made it an anomaly in its district. The district was, at the time of this study, exerting pressure on the school to shift to more standardized curriculum practices, but the school was actively resisting this pressure. It did so by providing teachers with PD opportunities designed to professionalize teachers in instructional decision-making around balanced literacy.

Hidalgo constituted a purposeful site selection (Creswell, 2013) for examining teacher reflection in a video-based PLC, because school administration and local university faculty were working together in a significant collaboration to create a whole-school professional development focused on balanced literacy.

Participants

In an effort to both document and describe the professional development in place at this school, researchers collected data over five months, conducting observations of whole-school professional development sessions and small group sessions (Steeg & Lambson, 2015). Interviews about the professional development with administrators, teachers, and faculty members were conducted at various points in the research process. To get a fine-grained idea of how balanced literacy was being implemented, researchers recruited the fifth-grade team to participate in further examining their own learning and development. This team, consisting of three teachers and one student teacher, allowed researchers to conduct bi-weekly observations and video-recordings of their balanced literacy instruction and participate in an informal PLC around questions emerging from their literacy instruction practices. That PLC is the one under study for this article. There were a total of six participants in this PLC including the two researchers.

Clarissa was a second-year teacher working with fifth-grade students for the second year in a row. She was Caucasian and spoke Spanish fluently. Classroom observations revealed her to be competent beyond her years, in terms of her high expectations for students, her ability to create and sustain a strong classroom community, and her evident thoughtfulness in her work with students. During the course of the PLC meetings, Clarissa focused on questions about her practice related to

maximizing student learning and assessing student progress.

Cassie was in her twelfth year of teaching, although it was her first year of teaching fifth-grade after eleven years of teaching kindergarten. She was of Hispanic origin and fluent in both Spanish and English. As one of the dual-language classrooms in the school, she alternated her language of instruction every two weeks, according to the school's dual-language policy. Cassie's strengths as a teacher lay in her constant reflection and ability to "follow" students' needs. Cassie focused on questions related to conferencing with students and record keeping that would enable her to track student progress.

Bob was in his first year of teaching fifth grade during the duration of the study. He was Caucasian and spoke a minimal amount of Spanish, in addition to fluent English. Although classroom observations evidenced that he dealt with many of the struggles that new teachers encounter with management, planning and overall vision, Bob demonstrated a teachable attitude and desire to learn. Bob was the quietest member of the group, choosing to listen much of the time rather than share. He asked questions of the other teachers, consistently commenting on how he "didn't know" the best thing because he was a new teacher. His personal focus in the PLC related to guided reading and what happened with students who practiced their reading strategies in guided reading groups.

Ashley was a student teacher working in Cassie's dual-language classroom during this study. Ashley participated in the PLC meetings, asking questions of herself and group members with enthusiasm. Of Hispanic origin, Ashley was proficient in Spanish and English, and taught in both languages as her teaching responsibilities gradually increased. She focused her questions on inquiring into what happens when she held students accountable for their work.

Dawn worked as a co-researcher with the author. Dawn's 30 years of teaching experience encompassed many grades and levels. Specifically, her work with reading and writing workshop, supporting bilingual students, and fostering teacher growth made her a significant addition to this PLC. Finally, the author participated in the PLC as a participant-observer and brought six years' experience of teaching various elementary grades and three years' experience of teaching graduate-level courses.

This team was particularly effective in its commitment to learning and growth as educators. They came together for the explicit purpose of bettering their literacy instruction and holding one another accountable their learning in the whole-school professional development model.

Procedure

The focus of this article is on the PLC meetings conducted by the fifth-grade team, to explain the participation and reflection about balanced literacy instruction that was evident in this particular PLC. Researchers and teachers met for one hour a total of six times over a spring semester to review video vignettes of three teachers' and one student teacher's balanced literacy instruction and to reflect together on how they were implementing the balanced literacy professional development. The purpose of these PLC meetings was to support the grade level team in enacting the balanced literacy practices being taught in the whole-school professional development.

The two researchers operated as participant-observers alongside teachers, collecting instructional video-data and providing accountability to meet together with teachers. The researchers' goal for these meetings was simply to bring the team together around the video clips and ascertain what emerged in terms of teachers' participation and reflection. This goal was

congruent with the larger goal held by the school and administration, who were supportive of a PLC designed to support the whole-school's emphasis on balanced literacy. Teachers asked their own inquiry questions within the group, recognizing that these questions would constitute a helpful focus to the work they were doing together.

Video-based reflection constituted a significant portion of the PLC time. PLC meeting format typically began with a brief time of small talk, with the researchers cueing the first teacher's video on a laptop computer for everyone to watch. The teacher-selected clip played before that teacher contextualized it, answered questions, and reflected aloud about his/her teaching. Discussion proceeded from there, ranging from dialogue around particular learners, classroom management issues, and/or shared ideas about ways to improve balanced literacy instruction. This process of observation and conversation supported a rich description of the teachers' learning and reflection on their professional development. PLC meetings happened during a shared prep, so the time was bounded and used wisely.

Researchers partnered with teachers to collaborate around questions emerging from teachers' experience, although this was not a co-participatory research. The researchers sought to maintain a position of camaraderie, asking questions alongside teachers. Researchers did not enter the PLC with a mindset of giving answers or advice, but rather sought to learn about these teachers' experiences and questions, operating as participant-observers (Merriam, 1998). Most often, the two researchers involved in this PLC allowed the conversation to take its own course, rather than inserting questions. Researchers shared their own observations and insights in ways that felt natural to the moments of conversation, but the agenda was one of documentation and support for teachers' process.

Data Collection

The bounded system (Merriam, 1998) or case for this study was the teacher talk emerging from a grade-level PLC. It constituted an intrinsic and descriptive case because it focused on a unique learning environment in which to study teachers' constructed understandings of balanced literacy. Classroom observations and recordings of teachers' teaching, teacher interviews, and recordings of teachers' video-based reflection constituted the data collected for this study (Creswell, 2013, Merriam, 1998).

Interviews were conducted with each participating member of the PLC. Researchers queried teachers regarding the experience of being involved in the PLC and the learning that had taken place as a result of the school-wide professional development. Researchers conducted classroom observations and field noted these observations at the same time as they collected video data of balanced literacy instruction. This provided a secondary source of data to the video, which supported a nuanced look at any given video clip. The two researchers collected videos of teachers' literacy instruction on a bi-weekly basis from the three teachers participating in the PLC. With teachers' permission, the camera was situated in an unobtrusive spot in the classroom and focused on the teacher, in order to capture teacher talk and instruction. Once the recording was completed, teachers took a minute or two to tell researchers which part of the video they wanted to watch and analyze at the following PLC meeting.

Video-based reflection embodies professional development ideals of a) community-building, b) inquiry-based thinking about one's teaching, and c) "critical colleagueship," a space in which teachers trust one another enough to constructively critique themselves and one another (Sherin & Han, 2004). This is significant because video-based conversations enable teachers to collaborate

instead of working in isolation. It also engages teachers in a type of reflection that is not possible in the moment-to-moment activity of a classroom. Finally, it promotes inquiry because the content of the conversations become new fodder for thinking. These ideals of community, inquiry, and critique constituted methodological ways of viewing teachers' participation. While video-based reflection is well-established in the literature as a helpful tool to support teachers in considering their practice (Rosaen, Lundeberg, Cooper, Fritzen, & Terpstra 2008; Sherin & Han, 2004), this study contributes additional voices to the conversations about why video-based reflection is worth the time it takes and offers examples of how teachers collaborated to support one another's learning.

Data Analysis

Erickson's (1986) analytic induction guided the data analysis process. Analytic induction is an analysis process by which assertions, vignettes, quotes, interpretive commentary, and theory are woven together to explicate findings. An interpretivist orientation informed this work, supporting an examination of the meaning of teachers' participation. Analysis began with rough transcriptions of the PLC conversations, which I searched for particularly meaningful exchanges between participants that seemed to constitute points of learning or tension. I transcribed those exchanges exactly. For example, places where teachers offered one another advice, whether solicited or unsolicited, constituted one of the themes or categories that became a self-evident point of tension and participation. Questions teachers posed to themselves or the group constituted another. These examples indicate the kinds of participation evident in the PLC. I also attended to places where teachers' reflective talk indicated something they were learning or going to try differently next time. Transcription was its own form of analysis; I familiarized myself with the data as I listened to it. Reading interview transcripts and video transcripts repeatedly, I took notes and worked to apprehend the data as a whole. This process led me to make various assertions based on the data and my own implicit knowledge based on my long-term, first-hand knowledge of these teachers and the PLC.

I established warrant for my assertions by looking for both confirming and disconfirming evidence, further adjusting the assertions and writing vignettes based on exchanges that took place during the PLC. Vignettes provided "focused descriptions of a series of events taken to be representative, typical, or emblematic" (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 182) of the data. The narrative structure of vignettes preserved the richness of field note data, synthesizing the conversational turns within a PLC meeting into a story of the action. I drew from teachers' dialogue to construct these conversations, and took little literary license with the narratives in order to highlight the learning events or reorganize them to connect ideas or themes. Vignette construction became a process of analysis, enabling me to convey the meaning of participants' everyday lives and provide evidence of my analysis. The vignettes also gave me a way to make sense of and give voice to my findings. By choosing highlights or excerpts from particularly representative conversations, and weaving them into one constructed conversation, I was able to capture critical reflections for my readers to preserve both flow and content.

One final step of analytic induction is to further substantiate narrative vignettes with supporting evidence, wherein key elements of each assertion, which are unrepresented in the vignette, are brought to light. Thus, this article follows a format of providing a brief explanation of a theme, provides an illustrative vignette, and supporting evidence.

Findings

Two key themes were evident across the data and are explicated below in the subheadings. First, teachers scaffolded their colleagues in collegial and affirming ways, offering support regarding whatever aspects of literacy instruction emerged from watching a given teacher's video footage. The PLC provided a place where the collegiality and trust these teachers had already built as a grade level team could manifest itself. Second, the teachers came to new understandings about their students' needs during this PLC and they adjusted their practice accordingly, using PLC time to construct their emerging notions of balanced literacy with one another.

Teachers Scaffolding Teachers

It was evident across the discussions that video-based reflection became an evocative stimulus for teachers to scaffold one another's learning. Teacher participation and conversation emerging from these conversations demonstrated that they appreciated opportunities to both solicit and offer advice about teaching. Teachers shared book suggestions and discussed the details of their teaching in ways that answered questions emerging from their practice, as evidenced in the following vignette. To illustrate this finding, the following vignette centers on Bob's learning related to managing his students' work habits during his balanced literacy block.

> *The group re-settled itself for a clear view of the laptop screen for the video excerpt from Bob's guided reading lesson. He was working with a small group of students to read Tiger Rising by Kate DiCamillo (2002). As the footage finished, Bob sighed, "Yeah, my lesson didn't go very well that day."*
>
> *At our questioning glances, Bob went on. "I put one of the teachers' aides in charge of students who were supposed to be reading silently while I worked with a guided reading group. I have had students read silently before, while I monitored them from a distance. I thought it would go better with another person watching over them, but they don't have any respect for her, so it didn't work. But, yeah, I really would appreciate advice on how to do independent reading."*
>
> *"What didn't work about it?" inquired Cassie.*
>
> *"Well, our day was really hectic to begin with. We did our balanced literacy time later than normal that day because we had two separate visits from the principal and vice-principal, and then (the researcher) came in to video-tape, and then on top of all that, we had a fire-drill."*
>
> *We all grimaced in sympathy at the disruptive nature of that day as Cassie interjected, "Bob, I've been in your classroom before and your students seem to do a good job with independent reading."*
>
> *"Yeah, well, I think it was different because of all the distractions and because I put the aide in charge of something I normally handle. She did things differently with letting kids move to more comfortable reading places."*
>
> *Clarissa followed up, "And you let them move even if they've been disruptive?"*
>
> *"Well, yeah, kinda. I just…" Bob's voice trailed off.*
>
> *She went on gently, "I just mean, in my classroom, if students don't make wise choices about where they'll read and they get distracted, they lose the privilege to choose their place for the rest of the week."*
>
> *"The rest of the week?" Bob's tone indicated he had never before considered this consequence.*

> *"Well, yes. I'm not going to let their poor choice distract me from my own teaching. It's just an expectation you establish," Clarissa said.*
>
> *"Yeah," Cassie chimed in, "if I see my students doing something wrong, I call them on it, right away. You can't let it go."*
>
> *"Okay, that's interesting. Thanks for the idea."*
>
> *With Bob's face indicating that he needed time to think about these ideas, the conversation moved on.*

This vignette illustrates the ways that the PLC supported teachers' individual questions, which emerged from the contexts of their practice. Albeit technical, these practical aspects of teaching were of particular importance to the teachers in this group: Bob was in his second year of teaching, Clarissa was a third-year teacher, Cassie was in her first year of teaching fifth-grade after a decade of teaching in early childhood, and Ashley was a student teacher. These teachers had all experienced recent shifts in their positions and needed time and space to make sense of these changes. The culture of collaboration at the school was extended into this PLC where formal time, space, and researcher support created an opportunity for teachers to intentionally engage in the reflective work required by change.

The conversation detailed in the vignette is based on a significant portion of a PLC conversation wherein Bob made a general plea to the group about how to manage his independent reading time. Classroom observations during this lesson demonstrated his need in this area; he interrupted his guided reading group instruction more than a dozen times to either visually or verbally correct, discipline, or restate directions to his independent readers. As researchers committed to supportive collaboration in this research, we did not point this out during the group but felt pleased when Bob raised the issue himself, after watching the video clip. He directly asked his fellow teachers for ideas:

> Bob: I know it didn't show it on the camera, but the class was really loud, like louder than they ever are during independent reading, and. . .there was a group of kids off-camera that was just out of control, loud and distracting everyone. So I think one of the things I need to focus on is how I can get the rest of the class doing what they're supposed to when I'm meeting with a group. Usually it's not that bad, but the fact that it happened shows that I need to do something, so that they know what's expected…So, whatever I need to do, like if you guys have any suggestions to help me make sure the rest of the group is engaged in their independent reading time…

Cassie responded to Bob's request first with some encouragement:

> Cassie: Well, I've been in there when you've done your silent reading, and they weren't talking there at all.This conversational move was significant; Cassie scaffolded Bob by helping him "save face." She did this by pointing out times she had seen his success with independent reading, even though he stated he needed help. This was not a denial of his need: everyone had just seen the video-clip demonstrating several interruptions resulting from students tattling on one another. Cassie began with encouragement, positioning Bob as a capable teacher and creating a safe place for him to state his needs.

As the conversation moved on, teachers supported Bob by acknowledging the difficulty of his situation that day, brainstorming solutions, and sharing stories from their own experience:

Cassie: One of the things I do, when I'm conferencing with someone, if I do see a student [misbehaving], I'll call them on it.

Bob: Right away, like you interrupt what you're doing?

Cassie: Yes, I'll either say something to them or pull them right next to me and have them read aloud, so that they know I'm paying attention to them…and make sure I talk to them either right away or shortly after.

Clarissa: I do the same thing, because once, if one or two people start talking, if you just ignore it, then it gets out of control. I couldn't really tell if you had them all at reading at their desks, or—

Bob: I have a timer, and I say after five minutes of reading quietly they can move…

Participants took care to phrase advice in terms of their own situations without passing judgment on one another's practice or learning.

Clarissa: What I do is, they [my students] have the right to choose where they read, but if they're talking and I have to look at them even once, they lose that privilege for the rest of the week. …Because their job during that time is to really enjoy their book, but if they're not doing that, then they need some help [from me]. The other thing you might want to do, is, I noticed that some of my students were getting off track because they didn't have good books for them, either their books were too hard or they didn't have a book they were interested in…

Researcher: Yes, that was something I noticed and wondered about—I saw a few of your students [speaking to Bob] reading the dictionary. Is that a typical thing?

Bob: No, it's their way of not doing what they're supposed to…I tell them they need to use the five-finger rule for everything they read…

Clarissa: And you just need to enforce that.

Bob: Okay, like what would you do? Would you…take the dictionary away?

Clarissa: Yeah. I put the timer on for ten minutes and everyone reads a non-fiction book of their choice. But after that ten minutes, everyone has to switch to a just-right book. It can still be a non-fiction book but it has to be just right for them.

This conversational excerpt demonstrates the way that PLC participants felt secure enough to take the risk of stating that they were having difficulty with certain issues, indicating a community mindset that valued support for one another. The varied experience lent strength to the conversations because they all approached the time as learners, recognizing that others were at different points in their learning. Analysis across major learning events indicated that participants took care to phrase advice in terms of their own situations without passing judgment on one another's practice or learning. This was indicated in both Cassie and Clarissa's statements about what they did in their own classrooms, as illustrations of what Bob might consider doing in his. These exchanges demonstrate how critical trust and colalaboration were to an established collegiality between these teachers within the PLC. This was embedded in the larger ideal of a school that would engage in whole-school professional development; there was a

school culture of teachers perceiving themselves as working together to improve their literacy instruction. Adding the video analysis was just another piece of that culture, creating a new way for teachers to collaborate to support themselves and one another. As a researcher involved in this team, I am uncertain that this learning would have occurred had we not set up the video sharing and discussion that we did. It was the established trust and collegiality that made it possible for teachers to take the risk of asking for and receiving advice.

As Clarissa's words note, she offered insight into her classroom community as a means for giving guidance without "giving advice." This allowed Bob (and perhaps others who had not directly stated their need) to "take or leave" her ideas, appropriating the learning for themselves based on their individual and interpersonal planes of experience (Rogoff, 1995). The PLC created a space wherein these types of exchanges were both practical and safe.

Additionally, this exchange demonstrates how teachers were making sense of the practical aspects of giving students choice in their reading. Students' ability to choose their own reading texts is widely acknowledged as a significant factor for learners (Atwell, 2007; Daniels, 2002; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). However, in Bob's classroom, students' ability to choose their reading material was not resulting in effective learning opportunities because of a lack of structure. Teachers demonstrated their belief in the importance of offering book choice by making suggestions on how Bob might manage this element of his balanced literacy block. Bob's request for help and the advice he received from his fellow teachers illustrated the way the PLC functioned to reduce the feelings of isolation so typical for first-year teachers (Egawa, 2009; Hord, 1997).

Later, when asked about how the experience of participating in the PLC supported his learning, Bob commented,

> Yeah…the experience was good for…getting feedback from other teachers. Because everyone has more experience than I do so it's always great to learn, from people who know a little bit more about things than I do. To hear ideas and be able to reflect, you know?

Bob's words reflected that he considered the PLC an important venue for his learning, because it provided him with a space to learn from his fellow teachers, through conversations based on questions emerging out of his experience. This addresses the research question raised at the beginning of this article: how might video-based reflection support teacher learning? It is indicated here that a new teacher like Bob found value in learning from others, even when his own video footage was not something he felt proud to show. Again, it is worth noting that it takes trust and collegiality to take the risk of inviting people into one's classroom. Not only did the PLC provide a place for teachers to scaffold one another's learning, it also enabled teachers to perceive new things about their students' needs and raise these issues with their colleagues.

Teachers Gained Insight on Student Needs

The PLC conversations enabled teachers to consider future instructional plans, constituting identifiable episodes of reflection for action (Urzúa & Vásquez, 2008). Teachers worked to understand students' needs and plan their future instruction accordingly. In the next vignette, Cassie's disappointment with her lack of knowledge about one of her students prompted a discussion about how she put her professional development learning to use with him and was surprised by the results.

"I can hardly believe that I'm just now figuring this out when it's well into the second semester, but some of my students have not been reading books that are just-right for them. It explains so much about why they're struggling!" exclaimed Cassie.

"Tell us more about that," encouraged Dawn.

"Well, I've been conferencing with students that I'm trying to support as readers, trying to get them to use strategies that work for them in Spanish, and transfer those strategies to English. That's my book study group, Conferring with Readers (Serravallo, & Goldberg, 2007). And when I start a conference with a student, I've started checking first thing to see if they are reading a just-right book, and it's like I've been fooled—I'm finding that kids are reading stuff that's just too difficult for them. One of my students, his understanding of the story was so superficial—he could only tell me about two characters in this long chapter book, so I helped him pick another book and checked back with him several days later. It was like night and day for him! That second book, he was able to tell me all the characters, what they were doing—even he could see the difference. But I'm like, here we are in March and we're finally getting him into a just-right book. Oh my gosh! It's a big lesson for me."

Everyone thought about that for a moment before Clarissa commented, "It's so hard to tell students 'that book is just not right for you as a reader'—but I tell them, 'even if you can say all the words, if you aren't understanding the story, it's not just right for you.' I've done two things to help a student of mine who consistently picks books that are too hard for her. First, if she wants to read a book that's too hard, I'll try to find it on tape, so she can read along with a fluent reader, and I also help her pick just-right books. I don't want to discourage her about reading, and I tell her, 'You can read these difficult books at home, but when you're at school, it has to be a just-right book.'"

Cassie responded, "Yeah, I think for me, it's an issue of holding both my students and myself accountable. I can't put it off if it gets too difficult. I also have to be realistic. So I made a schedule to help me keep up with my conferencing. I've also decided to write notes from our conferences in their response notebooks, and not fool with sticky notes, or starting a completely different notebook for myself. That's a simple, do-able process that will keep everything together. I think that can work for me.

The power of reflection is evident in this vignette, where the ritual of coming together and reflecting on action prompted reflection for action (Schön, 1983, 1991; Urzúa & Vásquez, 2008). Sociocultural theory values the creation of spaces such as these for teachers to mediate or re-voice emerging understandings. Cassie's words demonstrated her tension between the time that quality learning demands (Johnston-Parsons, 2010; Rogoff, 2003; Rodgers, 2002b) and her desire to know her students well enough to meet their needs. She discussed her commitment for her readers to focus on strategies, especially to support her second language learners in their effective use of reading strategies in both English and Spanish. The vignette further illustrates Cassie's process of realizing that one of her students had been reading books above his level, preventing him from making good progress as a reader. Her surprise about this indicates the way that teachers can lose track of student needs without meaning to, finding gaps between what they thought they knew about their students and the reality of a situation. This illustrates both the ways reflection can mediate

teacher learning, and the ways that PLCs provide a space in which to process and discuss it. Teachers who believe in the social nature of learning and commit themselves to students' learning (Rodgers, 2002b; Zeichner, 1994a) can be well-served by this time spent in reflection and discussion.

Additionally, the PLC provided ongoing support for Cassie's learning as Clarissa shared from her own experience of helping students find just-right books. In this and subsequent PLC meetings, Cassie began to discuss ways to keep track of her conferences with students, in an effort to gain consistent and personal knowledge about her students' needs. This conversation demonstrated both the tensions of learning and the significance of dialogue for devising ways to move forward (Johnston-Parsons, 2010). Later, in reflecting on the PLC and the larger professional development experience, Cassie stated:

> Well, I…I learned how to teach reading…[how] to specifically move a child from one level to another, and assess them, and see what it takes, and all the strategies, the specific strategies—we got so much stuff, and now, I'm like, "Oh! That's what they mean by that!" So, [I'm] able to identify, you know, their needs, which was a huge thing…to start with [my students] individually, and to know them individually and assess that, identify that, and then to have the strategy…we had some very…solid ways of how to teach the kid. Once I did that [tried the strategies for myself], I could see the kids moving and improving. So now that I see that, I'm like "Okay, look, I can do this,"…maybe it was just being able to teach…having the knowledge of how to teach reading.

The opportunity to see one's teaching reflected back in a video format made public the issues teachers were having and opened the way for them to reflect, think aloud, and ask for assistance within a supportive environment.

Cassie's learning experience was a unique one. In contrast to Bob, Cassie was an experienced teacher, but she had recently moved to teaching 5th grade after a decade of teaching kindergarten. As a result, she saw herself as a "beginner" all over again. She confided in us that she was working hard to understand literacy development and instruction at this level and was very open to learning and figuring things out. Her learner's mentality, along with years of classroom experience, resulted in Cassie being a very reflective teacher, one who approached her learning and teaching with thoughtful consideration and a questioning attitude. She appreciated being able to talk with her colleagues about what she was learning about balanced literacy and about how she was applying in her classroom. She worked to fit the pieces together in thoughtful ways, trying carefully to integrate her new learning from the professional development into what she knew about how children learn.

Cassie's words illustrate that the PLC and larger professional development supported her own thoughtful process, motivating a shift in her teaching that focused on instruction tied to students' needs, even as it supported Bob, a first-year teacher who was concerned with the more technical aspects of teaching. This model helped her make sense of her teaching in both the structure of balanced literacy and its implementation for individual learners.

Conclusions and Implications

The rationale for a study such as this is the opportunities it affords to gain glimpses into the complex phenomenon of teacher reflection and change (Hoffman-Kipp, Artiles, & López-Torres, 2008). This study illustrates the complexity and ever-shifting nature of teaching, and the ways PLCs can afford opportunities for teachers to grow in their literacy instruction practices. In answer to the research question, it is evident that, for this particular PLC, supportive and collaborative exchanges bolstered teacher reflection and learning in important ways. The opportunity to see one's teaching reflected back in a video format made public the issues teachers were having and opened the way for them to reflect, think aloud, and ask for assistance within a supportive environment. It also constituted opportunities for teachers to reflect for action, to determine what they would do next in their literacy instruction as a result of watching the videos (Urzúa & Vásquez, 2008). Teachers scaffolded one another's questions and gained new insights into student needs as a result of participation in this PLC.

Teachers constantly negotiate a myriad of situational dynamics in their work with children. From these interactions, they are themselves learners in the best sense of the word. In sharing these vignettes, I have worked to reveal the rich potential and possibilities embedded in video-based PLCs when they are structured around the questions, issues, and ideas that emerge from teachers' classrooms. I do not claim generalizability: this particular PLC was what it was because of its individual members, their existing working relationship, their collaborative relationships with university researchers interested in supporting teacher learning, and the larger context of the whole-school professional development in which they participated. I believe that the collaborative nature of this PLC between university and school faculty contributed to the accountability each member felt to show up, contribute, and invest in their own learning. However, while not generalizable, this study illustrates the ways PLCs can create spaces where teachers can share the tensions of their learning, dialogue about the complex issues that characterize their days (Ball, 2000), and reflect on past instruction in ways that inform future action (Urzúa & Vásquez, 2008).

The implications of a study like this include the idea that reviewing video segments of one's teaching alongside supportive colleagues can be a useful exercise in reflection (Sherin & Han, 2004). The teachers in this study were committed to their professional learning and appreciated the environment of accountability established by this video-based PLC. This study evidences how it provided ways for teachers to slow down the action of their work, see into one another's classrooms, and learn from other perspectives. PLCs seeking ways to extend their work across classroom boundaries may find that video footage of teachers' instruction makes it possible for participants to collaborate, reducing the isolation that comes from long days in one's own classroom (Egawa, 2009). Video-based reflection deserves increased attention in constituting ways that teachers can creatively collaborate to support their learning (Blumenfeld et al., 1996).

This PLC was especially valuable to teachers who worked hard to maintain the reputation of their school in the contested literacy spaces of the conservative southwest. As these teachers challenged the literacy practices of their district and state, they needed opportunities to socially construct the importance of their balanced literacy commitments and practice. These teachers welcomed tensions and dialogue for the potential they held for enabling them to "teach against the grain" (Cochran-Smith, 2001, p. 3). As Cochran-Smith (2001) writes, "we are chillingly close…to 'learning to teach by numbers' at a time when more

than ever we need teachers able and willing to teach against the (new) grain of standardized practices that treat teachers as interchangeable parts (p. 4)" This PLC provided the necessary opportunities for teachers to examine their growing understanding of the complex dimensions of literacy instruction even as they endeavored to meet the needs of their diverse students.

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