Collaborating about What?
An Instructor's Look
at Preservice Lesson Study

By Amy Noelle Parks

Over the last twenty years, collaborative practices in teacher education and professional development have received a great deal of (mostly positive) attention from researchers (e.g., Hawley & Valli, 1999; Little, 1999; Lord, 1994; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). More recently, lesson study, a common form of teacher learning in Japan, has been explored as a promising practice in part because it promotes collaboration. In lesson study, teachers work together to plan a detailed lesson designed to embody a particular educational goal or vision. While one teacher teaches the lesson, the others in the group gather data on students. These data are used to analyze the lesson with the goal of uncovering fundamental issues in teaching (Lewis, 2002).

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In their book, *The Teaching Gap*, Stigler and Hiebert (1999) suggested that lesson study could improve teaching because the practice is collaborative and situated in the classroom. In their work and elsewhere, collaboration in lesson study is assumed to be difficult to achieve, but to cause learning. Chokshi and Fernandez (2004, p. 521) wrote that "the collaborative nature of lesson study allows U.S. teachers to 'fill in the blanks' for one and another" in terms of content knowledge. Because collaboration has been assumed to lead to good outcomes, there has been little discussion

in lesson study literature about the ways that collaboration can hinder learning and educational change (e.g., Chokshi & Fernandez, 2004; Fernandez, Cannon & Chokshi, 2003; Hiebert & Stigler, 2000). In addition, many discussions of collaboration in the literature on teacher learning have tended to portray the primary problem for teacher educators as one *of increasing opportunities for* or *improving the practice of collaboration* (e.g., Ball & Cohen, 1999; Grossman, Wineburg & Woolworth, 2001; Lord, 1994; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). When Grossman and colleagues (2001) described the challenges involved in moving a group of teachers from a pseudo-community, where few genuine opinions were shared and little learning went on, to a community where teachers truthfully engaged with each other, they make it possible for other teacher educators to think about how they might build stronger collaborations; however, this work does not help others to see ways in which genuine collaborations can hinder learning or disguise non-learning.

Self studies of lesson study have been even less likely to examine the ways in which genuine collaboration can pose problems (e.g., Pickard, 2005; Pothen & Murata, 2006; Sam, White & Mon, 2005). In their comparison of lesson studies in two different countries, Sam, White and Mon (2005, p. 139) noted that the major problems faced as lesson study leaders were time constraints and differences in teachers' level of commitment to the process, writing that "'voluntary' versus 'instructed' [approaches to lesson study] affected the success or failure of the research outcome." The implication is that voluntary collaboration will lead to successful lesson study outcomes. Walker (2007) discussed the barriers to successful collaboration in lesson studies she led in Hong Kong, including tensions involving class, language use, and lack of confidence among the teacher participants. This sort of analysis can help other teacher educators pinpoint possible reasons for discomfort among their own participants, but it does not illuminate the challenges posed by collaborations where members feel welcome, productive, and successful. The purpose of the present study is to contribute to this line of work by looking closely at a collaboration in which the participants and the lesson study leader felt members genuinely and equitably participated in the design, teaching and analysis of a lesson. The goal of this article is not to examine ways that the collaboration fell short, but to consider the challenges that lie ahead for teacher educators after collaboration is achieved.

Collaboration as Community of Practice

Drawing on Wenger (1998), I frame collaboration as participation in a community of practice. Wenger described three dimensions that influence the coherence of a community: joint work, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire. In examining the interactions of the preservice teachers in the lesson study group, I looked at the extent to which the preservice teachers worked together to complete tasks (joint work), built relationships (mutual engagement) and developed a his-

tory of stories (shared repertoire). Table 1 provides examples and non examples of observed behavior in each of these categories.

In looking at each of these areas, I sought to determine whether the preservice teachers comprised a community of practice, or in my own language, engaged in collaboration. To explore issues related to collaboration and learning in preservice lesson study, I asked the following research question: How do preservice teachers participate in a lesson study cycle and what do they learn through this participation?

Action Research, Writing, and Cognitive Flexibility

The site for this study was a required action research course, which was offered as a capstone course at the end of a five-year teacher preparation program at a U.S. university. The goal of the course was to develop preservice teachers' inclinations toward and strategies for inquiry. In previous years, this course focused exclusively on individual action research projects; however, as the course instructor, I decided to include a collaborative lesson study option.

The course readings, assignments, and class discussions all focused on the process of inquiry. In addition to reading research about lesson study and action research, students learned to pose research questions, to take notes while observ-

Table 1
Examples and Non Examples of Collaborative Work

	Examples	*Non Examples*
Joint Work	Shared responsibility for completing written tasks	Individual completion of assigned tasks
	Shared responsibility for providing materials	Deferring to the intern who would teach the lesson
	Shared responsibility for suggesting ideas for teaching	
Mutual Engagement	Completing each other's sentences	Working silently, without consultation
	Checking for agreement	Making decisions independently
	Soliciting each other's opinions	Treating outsiders as group members
Shared Repertoire	Using terms familiar to the group	Explaining personal terms
	Summarizing earlier events in shorthand phrases	References to individual classroom experiences
	Telling inside jokes	

ing classrooms, and to interview children and adults. The course did not have a disciplinary focus and various projects in the course explored teaching in reading, writing, mathematics, and science, as well as multi-disciplinary topics, such as cooperative grouping and home-school relationships. I asked students to rely on previous discipline-specific methods courses to frame their projects and to use their previous methods instructors as resources. Course time was not spent on developing content knowledge specifically related to their inquiries. This context posed unique challenges in my facilitation of the lesson studies.

The lesson study group discussed in this article focused on the discipline of writing. The students in the focal lesson-study group had taken a literacy course together the previous semester, which emphasized linking students' spoken and written language, drawing on students' home experiences in their writing, and designing writing workshops to enhance the learning of all children. Although I was not a literacy methods instructor, I was familiar with many writing practices from my years as an elementary school teacher. In addition, I met with the literacy methods instructor on two occasions about the lesson study and invited her to come to the group's debriefing to serve as a literacy "expert." The vision of writing instruction presented by the methods instructor in her course and in her lesson study interactions with the group was complicated, requiring students to make judgments in the moment about interactions with children. She encouraged the beginning teachers to get to know the children in their classes through conversations and to make moves in individual writing conferences that drew on this developing personal knowledge of children to foster written literacy in a variety of ways.

In contrast, the beginning teachers encountered a relatively straightforward writing curriculum in their placement schools, which was based on "6+1 traits" of good writing, such as voice, word choice, and conventions (Culhan, 2003). In the placement schools, these traits were taught separately in sequence before being used together. As part of the *6+1 traits* process, writing lessons were often rigidly structured as students moved from mini-lessons that emphasized one trait, to writing which emphasized the same trait, to sharing of the writing.

Many of the tensions explored throughout this article occurred in the context of these two competing visions of writing instruction. As Spiro, Coulson, Feltovich, and Anderson (1988, p. 4) pointed out in their discussion of cognitive flexibility theory, novices in a field may be drawn to simple knowledge systems that "are often in conflict with the realities of advanced learning—knowledge that is intertwined and dependent, has significant context-dependent variations, and requires the ability to respond flexibly to 'messy' application systems." Spiro and his colleagues described the tendency of beginners in a field to simplify complex structures and to rely on abstract rules or generalizations rather than to draw on the particularities of individual cases. This theory sheds light on the differences between the messy vision of writing the beginning teachers encountered in their literacy methods course and the 6+1 traits approach they encountered in their placement schools.

The structured framework of the 6+1 traits approach provided rules for teaching writing that the beginning teachers could impose on classroom situations, while the literacy methods course encouraged students to make teaching judgments in the moment based on context. In addition to analyzing collaboration in the lesson study, the findings section of this article will also explore my attempts as a facilitator to shift the perspectives of the beginning teachers from the simple, rule-based notions of writing that they encountered in their placement classrooms toward the more complex one they explored in their university methods course.

Methods

Because lesson study was still a relatively new practice in U.S. teacher education, I decided to study my facilitation of the two groups in my course who chose to do lesson study projects. Initially, I was interested in the differences between the successful collaboration of one group versus the unsuccessful collaboration of the other. However, after my analysis of conversations in the two groups, I was surprised to see that the members of the group I had seen as successful while I was teaching the course had not made any more significant changes in the ways they thought about children and curriculum than the group that I had seen as unsuccessful. Therefore, this article focuses on the interactions of the "successful" group, examining both the quality of their collaboration as well as their thinking about students and curriculum.

The three members of this group, all in their early twenties, had received their bachelor's degrees in education the year before the study and were in the process of finishing year-long internships required for certification. Kati, an Asian-American intern placed in a second-grade class in a school that served children in grades 2-5, agreed to teach the research lesson. Anna and Daphne, both European American, taught at the primary school that fed into Kati's.

In designing this self study, I drew on interpretive research traditions (Erickson, 1986; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) to make decisions about which data to collect, how to collect it, and how to analyze and interpret it. During the first four weeks of the course, the lesson study groups spent a total of three hours planning their lesson studies in class. I audio taped and transcribed these sessions, in addition to jotting down fieldnotes after each class. I also audio taped and transcribed one of the two planning sessions my groups held outside of class. I audio taped and video recorded the teaching of the research lessons and the discussions immediately afterward and wrote detailed field notes on both these activities. I also audio recorded and transcribed the three in-class discussions the groups devoted to analyzing data after the research lesson had been taught.

In addition to transcripts of work sessions, I saved all written work the groups produced, annotated copies of my lesson plans, and entries from my teaching journal. After the course ended, I interviewed Kati, Daphne and Anna separately about their experiences and then taped and transcribed each of these 30-minute interviews.

I began my data analysis by selecting for close examination a typical conversational text (covering about 5 minutes) where the interns were making teaching decisions. I used this section of transcript to develop initial coding categories to examine the extent of collaboration as well as to identify statements about students and curriculum. Following Wenger, I looked for instances of joint work, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire. I also looked for instances that could be said to show the absence of these qualities. For instance, the category of "Joint Work" included a code for sharing responsibility for written work (an example of joint work) as well as a code for individual completion of tasks (a non-example).

Because I was looking at learning as participation, I also looked at how the interns' participation in the lesson study changed (or did not change) throughout the experience. That is, I looked at how the interns spoke about various topics at the beginning of the lesson study and compared that to how they spoke about those topics at the end of the lesson study. To examine possible changes, I coded for three major topic categories in the interns' speech and writing: discussions of students, discussions of writing pedagogy, and discussions of classroom management. Finally, I broke all transcripts into conversational episodes (Tannen, 1994). I sorted these episodes into three categories: conversations with me, conversations with others, and conversations among the group members. I then looked for relationships between these categories and discussion-topic categories. For instance, I examined how conversations about students were different in episodes that included just the three focal interns and in episodes that included others. The major assertions of this article—that the interns in this study *did* collaborate and that this collaboration did not lead to significant learning—were based on the analysis of the coded data.

Collaboration within a Community of Practice

In their semester-long work on the lesson study project, the three interns shared responsibility for the completion of all lesson study assignments (joint work), built a sense of membership (mutual engagement), and developed a common history of work and discourse (shared repertoire). Kati, Anna, and Daphne decided that they wanted to focus on creating independent, motivated, and creative writers in Kati's second-grade classroom. They decided to use a toy to generate small-group discussions, which students could draw on during their writing. In the lesson they ultimately agreed on, Kati's second-graders talked in small groups for about five minutes about a plastic boat before writing individual stories based on the ideas generated during these discussions. Before the second-graders held their discussions, a group of adult volunteers modeled a discussion about a toy animal and the class was shown some stories that these adults could have written based on the model discussion. The mini-lesson focused on sentence fluency, emphasizing the writing of a topic sentence and related details.

Joint Work

On the most basic level, the interns expected each other to contribute to the work of the group. During both the in-class and out-of-class planning sessions, they took turns typing the plans as well as contributing ideas. They shared responsibility not only for required assignments, but also for additional tasks, such as writing a letter about the research lesson to the parents of Kati's students. They wrote all of the work they turned in to me together and put all three of their names on top. (This was not the pattern the other lesson study group adopted. In that group, individuals took turns writing the required assignments.) Because Kati, Daphne, and Anna insisted on sharing responsibility, they often took much longer to complete assignments than other groups. It was common for them to remain together after class had ended to continue working.

Another way the three interns revealed their sense of shared responsibility was in the way they moved in and out of the voice of the teacher. In the second planning session, Daphne was talking about the transition between the model discussion of the adult volunteers and the mini-lesson. Taking on the voice of the teacher she said, "Give me a few ideas of what you saw in the discussion, when my friends were modeling." Even though she would not be teaching the lesson, she was imagining herself in front of the room talking to children. Making her point in this way is quite different than making a "Why don't you?" suggestion to Kati (a more common phrasing in the other lesson study group). Daphne and Anna almost never made a teaching suggestion by addressing Kati as "you." Instead, they either took on the voice of the teacher, or they began by saying "we." Even Kati, whose class it was, distributed ownership when talking about the lesson. In explaining what her group had done to outsiders, she said, "So this is what the people observed *our* students—I mean, my students—doing" (emphasis added).

Mutual Engagement

Kati, who taught the lesson, was certainly the central participant in the lesson study; however, both Daphne and Anna demonstrated a deep investment in the lesson. During the interview when asked what working together had been like, Daphne said the lesson study had been different from all the other group projects she had done in high school and college. When I asked why, she said, "We worked together to think of this idea and then we built on it together. ... This was just different because you all had a common goal and you were working together to do that. It felt more—there was more ownership of it."

Anna's and Daphne's roles as full participants can be most clearly seen in relation to the peripheral participation of others involved in the project. My own participation in the community was largely cursory. In part, this can be seen in the amount of time I spent with them. Generally, I had only about one five-minute conversation with them each time they met in class (far less time than I spent with most other groups because this group stayed so focused throughout class time).

When I moved into their conversations, I did not join seamlessly in the flow of conversation, but disrupted it, creating a new dynamic. The interns were quite comfortable interrupting each other to finish a sentence, but they never did this with me.

In the following example, the three interns are working together to decide how they will begin the lesson. Earlier, they had agreed to use adults to model a discussion for the children to show how writers can get ideas for stories by talking to other people. Here, Kati is rehearsing how she will introduce the adult volunteers for the model discussion. When she trails off, both Anna and Daphne join in.

> *Kati:* Okay, I want you to really listen how their stories will, how their ideas are different, wait.
>
> *Daphne:* How their stories will differ even though they're —
>
> *Anna:* Thinking about the same object.
>
> *Daphne:* Yeah, even though they're coming up with, even though they're using the same object.
>
> *Kati:* Yeah.
>
> *Daphne:* It can be different.

It is clear even in this short exchange that both Anna and Daphne feel comfortable drafting language for the lesson, even though it will not be taught in their classrooms. Discussions comprised of fragmented sentences like these are far more common throughout my data than speeches where one intern is talking for a long time. For example, during the planning meeting where the above discussion occurred, fewer than 10 turns lasted more than three sentences (out of more than 400 turns all together). In contrast, when I talked to the group, I spoke in paragraph-long chunks and was never interrupted. Perhaps, more surprising, Daphne, Anna, and Kati did not interrupt or finish the sentences of the other interns they invited to observe their research lesson and to participate in the debriefing afterward. In this way, their engagement with each other, and their exclusion of others, was marked in their ways of speaking.

Shared Repertoire

Wenger (1998) suggested that one of the features of communities of practice is the development of a history of language and artifacts. Kati, Daphne, and Anna passed vocabulary among them, creating terms that had particular meaning for their group, but not the rest of my class. For instance, when Kati first used the term "bubble time" to describe quiet writing (all the children are in imaginary bubbles) neither Daphne nor Anna knew what she meant. However, by the end of the cycle, all three interns used the phrase (and had to explain it in their presentation to the rest of the class). More complex concepts and experiences also got reduced to

phrases during the lesson study cycle. During their analysis of student work, Kati brought up an example from the observation notes of a student transitioning from listening to a previous child's story to telling his own.

> *Kati:* This one that I found is really good. It shows he's using ideas from others. 'I've never been on a cruise, but I've been on a different boat, like this one'—and he picks up the plastic boat.

> *Anna:* I've never been to the *zoo*, but I've been to *The Lion King*.

To an outsider, Anna's statement seems unrelated, but Anna was making an argument that she expected Kati and Daphne to understand. Anna quoted something that one of adults said during the model discussion, and by doing so, she suggested that the student talk that Kati read is representative not only of students building on each other's ideas, but also of using the structures from the model discussion in their own conversations.

Confirming Beliefs through Collaboration

The previous section of the article demonstrates that the three interns I studied did collaborate. The next two sections look at ways that collaboration hindered—rather than caused—learning and change. During planning, the three interns consistently expressed similar beliefs about the teaching of writing, the nature of student ability, and the role of management in the classroom. More specifically, during the first two planning sessions, each intern on at least one occasion put forward the following beliefs: that silence was essential for writing, that teachers must structure student writing, that the teacher must adopt management strategies to keep students quiet, and that students could be described as good writers or bad writers without attention to the context of a particular writing task.

In the following example from one of the early planning sessions, the interns discussed how the teacher would structure the children's writing assignment by drawing on the adult model discussion. The interns were trying to figure out how the teacher could show the children that very different stories could be inspired by the same discussion. They decided they would show examples of two very different stories and discuss them.

> *Anna:* Right. Well, we can say, "Look how they both had similar ideas and they're both writing about a boat, but look at their pieces of writing. See how different they are?"

> *Kati:* Yes. And this is a good piece of writing because it has a title. It starts off with a great topic sentence.

> *Anna:* So it's going to turn into the mini-lesson.

> *Kati:* Yeah, that the topic sentence describes what they're going to be writing about. They must have three details.

Daphne: That's good writing.

In this episode, Kati suggests that a primary feature of "good writing" is that it has a title, starts with a topic sentence, and has three details. Rather than question whether such rigid requirements might make it more difficult for students to write creatively or to link their stories to their conversations, both of which were goals of the lesson study, Anna and Daphne built on Kati's idea. These ideas about emphasizing topic sentences and details were far more in line with the 6+1 traits program used in the placement school than with the writing instruction discussed in their literacy methods course. In the curriculum used at the school, teachers were encouraged to break writing down into discrete chunks for children—such as writing topic sentences or using interesting words. In contrast, the literacy methods course had encouraged students to think about writing as an opportunity to tell stories.

None of the interns suggested an alternative topic for a mini-lesson in this or any of the other planning episodes. These views did not change after the research lesson. In the analysis sessions, the interns evaluated student work based the whether they had a title, a topic sentence and three detail sentences. Stories that did not meet these criteria were described as "not meeting standards," "poor," and "limited," regardless of other textual features such as the use of dialogue, even when I brought these features to their attention. All three interns brought up talking during writing time as one of the possible reasons that students had not met standards. None suggested that this talking might have supported students' efforts to write. Again, the notion of talk supporting written text was emphasized in the university methods course, but had been downplayed at the placement school. Despite their experiences in the methods course and my encouragement to promote student conversation, the beginning teachers were repeatedly drawn to the more simplistic system for teaching writing present in the placement schools. Spiro and colleagues (1987) would suggest that this tendency toward simplicity is characteristic of novices and required more aggressive challenging on my part.

Assumptions about students went similarly unchallenged by the members of the lesson study group. All three interns seemed to operate from the belief that there were good writers and bad writers as well as motivated writers and unmotivated writers. During planning sessions, they discussed creating groups by ability and by level of motivation and decided to form groups that had students who were highly motivated as well as students who were unmotivated. As an outgrowth of this discussion, Daphne and Anna suggested that Kati write comments about the children in her class to help the observers. In the final plans, Kati wrote comments beside the names of 14 of her 25 students. These included: "Ella: loves to write; Allen: very distracted, probably will not get anything done; Kara: very creative, takes a long time." Neither Daphne nor Anna questioned the appropriateness of these comments or asked about how Kati had made these judgments. In fact, they both mentioned how helpful these comments had been. At least publicly, none of

the three interns questioned how labeling Kara as creative impacted judgments about students without that label or wondered how having lower expectations of Allen might impact their observations.

My efforts to challenge these assumptions later met with little success. During the teaching of the research lesson, Allen proved to be excited about his story, drawing an elaborate planning sheet, and writing more than was typical. I brought up Allen's excitement during the debriefing to encourage the interns to think about the ways that teachers can impact students' engagement and learning. Anna pointed out that he had not finished his story and had spent a lot of time drawing pictures. In response, I said: "His picture was really elaborate. It wasn't—in my opinion—wasting time. He made cartoon bubbles with little speeches coming out of them." In response, the interns made polite noises of agreement; however, this issue, as well as others I raised during the debriefing, did not seem to significantly impact the interns' learning. In the analytic memo the group turned into me at the end of the semester, they did not mention Allen's excitement. Instead, they focused on students who had turned in stories that included a title, a topic sentence and three details and discussed the challenges of maintaining quiet during individual writing time. Their questions for future research came from discussions they had on their own—such as "What would be the effect of using multiple objects to prompt discussions?"—rather than from discussions with me or with their literacy methods instructor, who observed and commented on the research lesson. When I asked them in interviews what they would change about the lesson, none of them mentioned the content of the mini-lesson, the necessity for silence, or the low expectations for some students. When asked what she learned in the lesson study, Kati said:

> It's a very positive thing from writing to have them be able to discuss their ideas. Because they want to talk. They don't want to be completely silent up there writing. It triggered a lot of the students—okay, not a lot—a few of the students who don't like to write. It helped them with their ideas.

Here, it seemed that she was considering the idea that the way she structured her lesson (by including discussion) allowed students who had previously struggled to succeed. But immediately after, she went on to say, "I mean, the students that we have who don't write, didn't write. Only one of our students didn't write in the actual final piece." In this quote, Kati restated what seems to have been her original belief: students can be labeled good or bad writers and that they are likely to conform to those labels regardless of what the teacher does. She made this statement, even while acknowledging, that in this lesson, only one student in her class did not complete the writing assignment.

The Challenges of Collaboration

After discovering that the interns made little change in how they talked about writing and students during the lesson study, I went back to examine conversational

episodes to identify factors that may have contributed to this lack of change. One of the primary factors seemed to be the way that the interns went about decision making. The three interns rarely offered reasons for what they proposed to do and were almost never asked by their colleagues to explain their thinking when they suggested a course of action. The following episode, which occurred during the group's first planning meeting, is typical of how the group made decisions about the content and structure of their lesson. Kati, Daphne, and Anna were trying to decide how to introduce their manipulatives to small groups of students in Kati's classroom. Kati opened the episode by asking the others if they should introduce the objects to the whole class before beginning or just put them down on tables.

> *Anna:* I don't think we should show them all the objects because then they'll be like "Oh, I want the shell. Oh, I want the tree."

> *Daphne:* So do we want them to have different objects? Do we want them to be able to pick? Because I think if they're different that could cause the "I want that" or "Uhh, they got that. That's not fair." You know, I think it could be more of a—

> *Anna:* A distraction.

> *Daphne:* To have different things. I think *we* should, for the modeling, have a different object.

> *Anna:* Oh, definitely.

In this episode three hypotheses were advanced: Anna suggested that they should not show all the manipulatives to the class before beginning; Daphne argued that all groups should have the same object and later that the teachers modeling should use a different object than the ones that would be used by the children. When Daphne said that the teachers modeling should use a different object than the children, Anna emphatically agreed without either giving a reason or hearing one from Daphne. She took it for granted that the sense of Daphne's statement was evident to all. When Anna and Daphne offered reasons for their earlier claims—that the class should not be shown the manipulatives ahead of time and that all groups should use the same object—they based their arguments on management concerns rather than on insights about the teaching of writing, the goals of their lesson, or the academic needs of Kati's students. Both of them saw the manipulatives as a potential source of arguments among students, and took it for granted that arguments are to be avoided, even in a lesson that is seeking to promote discussion. They reinforced for each other the idea that management is the primary concern when planning a lesson.

This pattern is present in nearly all of the 20 decision-making episodes that occurred in the planning sessions. Whether the topic was the content of the mini-lesson, the length of the discussion period, the themes of the modeling, or type of manipulative, all three interns put forward assertions without drawing on either their knowledge of writing or the goals of their own lesson. In the interviews after

the lesson study cycle, all three interns mentioned their shared vision of teaching as one of the major reasons they collaborated so well. When I asked Anna why she thought they had disagreed so rarely she said: "We knew each other. We had started in August so we did have a foundation together. We weren't strangers. But I think we all just wanted kind of the same things, underneath." The word *underneath* seems important here. Because the interns agreed so readily on how they wanted to enact their lesson, many of their beliefs and understandings about teaching writing remained implicit. These interns shared not only experiences throughout their coursework, but also placement schools that fostered similar beliefs about writing and students. Anna's comment here, as well as similar ones made by Daphne and Kati, suggests that the reason discussions were often truncated was not that the interns were nervous about voicing their opinions as in the pseudo-community described by Grossman and colleagues (2001), but that the interns' underlying beliefs and assumptions were strengthened rather than challenged by the joint work.

Another factor in the lack of change in beliefs about children and writing was the relative ineffectiveness of my own interactions with the interns in this group, which in part resulted from the strength of their collaboration. Even when I worked to push the interns on instructional matters, my interventions were often seen as the efforts of an outsider to intrude on the group. During our debriefing after the research lesson had been taught, I tried to push on the group's ideas about the importance of silence for writing. There had been a great deal of student conversation throughout the lesson, and I asked if this was typical. Kati noted that her class often looked off-task, but if questioned, showed they had been paying attention.

> *Amy:* So does that make you think differently about the kind of environment you're trying to maintain?

> *Kati:* Right, should it—yeah, definitely. I think it's very dependent on the situation. I think writing is definitely, I think this is very key for writing, to be able to discuss it, but then I think there should be a time when they should just be able to focus on their writing. Maybe during their plans and stuff, I don't know. Brainstorming, they should have conversations. But I think at a point, they should be quiet so they don't get off-task. It should be "Okay, this is your writing time."

> *Daphne:* They need that time to be focused. Without distractions.

Although I asked Kati to reflect on this lesson where students had been both productive and talkative, Kati maintained her position that silence is necessary for writing, even if conversation during planning is productive. Daphne jumped into the conversation to support Kati's position. Their agreement with each other may have made it less likely that each would think seriously about the point I raised.

Similarly, the three interns worked together to push aside critique from their former literacy methods instructor when she raised questions during the lesson study debriefing. She began her comments by saying: "The coolest part of the whole thing was the discussion around the object. So the mini-lesson could have

focused on the ideas and the talk." She then went on to say that mini-lessons did not always have to focus on the structure of writing or on particular traits, but could be used to form a community of readers and writers who were interested in each other's stories and ideas. Anna agreed that this goal was important, but then said that the children really needed to learn what good writing looked like. Kati agreed, saying: "My children have never written anything so organized before—with all the parts. I think it was really important to talk about the topic sentences." Daphne then volunteered two examples of good topic sentences and the conversation moved on. All three interns expressed at various times, affection for both me and the writing instructor; however, our challenges often were not taken up by the group, in part because of their tight collaborative bond and in part because of their attraction to the writing system they had picked up in their placement school.

Discussion

This study suggests that resistance to collaboration may not be the biggest obstacle to enacting lesson studies with preservice teachers. All three interns considered the opportunity to collaborate a benefit of the process and worked to make all aspects of process communal, even when that meant meeting for additional hours outside of class. However, their dispositions toward collaboration did not translate into either deep explorations of teaching or the questioning of assumptions about students. Perhaps this is not so surprising. Despite the many positive discussions of collaboration in the literature, several researchers have raised concerns about the ways that collaborative communities of practice can both exclude and resist innovation (e.g., Fendler, 2006; Little, 1990; Parks, 2008). In a discussion of teacher learning, Little (1990, pp. 509-510) wrote:

> Teachers' collaborations sometimes serve the purposes of well-conceived change, but the assumed link between increased collegial contact and improvement-oriented change does not seem to be warranted: Closely bound groups are instruments both for promoting change and for conserving the present.

This study lends empirical support to this critique and suggests that in collaborations of novices in particular, a big challenge for facilitators may be helping participants to question shared beliefs and assumptions that rely on simplistic or easily summarized explanations. Spiro and colleagues (1987) offered a few strategies for doing this work, including use of multiple representations for complex concepts, emphasis of diverse cases, and focus on knowledge-in-use, rather than on abstract generalities.

This challenging of previously held beliefs and simplistic notions of writing instruction was something I failed to do during the in-class planning and analysis sessions. In part, this was probably a result of my own preoccupation with the procedures of lesson study, my anxiety about doing it "right," and my desire to cede control to my students. However, I was also uninvolved with this group during

in-class work sessions precisely because the group's collaboration was successful. Each time I passed by this group, I heard them discussing the lesson passionately, sharing ideas, and making plans. They produced far more written work than was required of them and shared the responsibility for producing that work far more equally among members than other groups. As a result, I spent much of my class time working with groups that were having "problems." For instance, several of my working groups for the action research project rarely spoke to each other so I spent significant time trying to get conversations going. In the other lesson study group, one person seemed to be doing nearly all the work so I intervened frequently. As a teacher, I thought Kari, Daphne, and Anna were doing "good work," and it was only when I had time as a researcher to consider the depth of their conversations that I became concerned about whether these three beginning teachers had learned from the experience.

Going into my initial experience with lesson study, I believed that the differences among my students would cause them to question each other's assumptions about both teaching and students. Kari, Daphne, and Anna taught different grade levels in different schools, had different experiences of their own childhoods, grew up in different geographic areas of the country, and identified as different ethnicities. As a teacher, I overestimated the power of these differences to open sites for discussion about both writing and children. At the same time, I underestimated the power of the similarity of their experiences in university coursework and of public schooling more broadly. In retrospect, I would have taken on far more of a leadership role in raising the issues with which I was most concerned. Although I did not have a particular writing pedagogy that I desired to promote, I did wish for them to seriously consider alternatives and to make teaching decisions based on their own analysis of what particular practices would offer the children in Kati's classroom. Their quick agreement about most teaching decisions shut down the possibility for careful deliberation. My own interventions needed to be more forceful. For example, I could have asked them to consider in writing two possible lessons and to evaluate the pros and cons of each one, and to support this analysis I could have provided a framework in line with the emphasis on children's thinking and talking that my students had encountered in their writing methods class. This might have disrupted their reliance on the 6+1 traits formula as the structure for their lessons. I could also have had them develop mini-cases of particular students in the writing lesson as a way of highlighting the very different interactions that might be required by a teacher in a single writing lesson. Similarly, I could have asked them to discuss in their final write up the extent to which Kati's predictive comments about her children's performance had been correct, drawing particular attention to the unexpected participation of certain students.

Having poured over transcripts, it is easy to see the need for these interventions now. However, at the time, my complacency as a teacher was bolstered by favorable comments Kari, Daphne, and Anna made about the lesson study project throughout

the course. At various times, each of them said things like this lesson study experience was "really beneficial," "so valuable," "important," "unlike anything I've done before." These comments were often followed by comments about how much they enjoyed working together. The strength of their community made both the beginning teachers and me feel as if they were learning. This issue raises questions about the value of self-reporting and interviews in making sense of the learning opportunities offered in lesson-study and other collaborative learning experiences.

In considering research about collaborative teacher learning more broadly, it may be productive to ask different kinds of questions than those that have been asked most frequently in the past. In particular, it would be worthwhile to identify characteristics of collaborations that cause learning as well as characteristics of collaborations that do not. These characteristics may be related to specific practices of collaborative groups—such as the extent to which knowledgeable others are considered part of the community. Important characteristics may also be related to who community members are—people with very similar or very different teaching styles and beliefs—and to the overall environment in which the collaboration is situated. For instance, it may be that collaboration actually works against professional development efforts that have a goal of changing the culture of a school because members may reinforce each other's original beliefs and practices. To explore these questions, researchers will have to disentangle the idea of "collaboration" from the idea of "educative." This challenge is particularly great for researchers who study their own practices because the close observation of successful collaborations can be so emotionally satisfying that the success itself makes it difficult to clearly see the quality of the intellectual work.

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