

Book Clubs as Professional Development Opportunities for Preservice Teacher Candidates and Practicing Teachers: An Exploratory Study

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The issue of professional development is receiving increased attention, as educators and policy makers are realizing the centrality of teachers to school reform and improvement. This paper describes research on book clubs as a mechanism for professional development and discusses how different study group configurations (i.e., preservice teacher candidates and practicing teachers) utilized book club activities as a central component of their professional development activities. While participation in professional book clubs provides opportunities to examine educational issues, the process is complex and should be examined carefully.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of professional development is receiving increased attention, as educators and policy makers at all levels are realizing the centrality of teachers to school reform and improvement (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Guskey, 2003; Keller, 2003).

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The educational community is searching for alternative ways to actively involve practicing teachers in their own professional development and teacher educators are working to nurture the professional development practices of practicing teachers within the contexts of preservice teacher education (Bucci, 2000; Cobb, 2001; Delandshere & Arens, 2003; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Gallego, Hollingsworth, & Whitenack, 2001). This study describes research on similarities and differences in preservice teacher candidates' and practicing teachers' participation in professional book clubs. While participation in professional book clubs provides opportunities to explore educational issues, the process is complex and needs to be examined carefully.

As novices enter the teaching profession, they are often overwhelmed by the challenges of beginning their careers (Berliner, 1994; Feldman, Rearick, & Weiss, 1999; Moore, 2003; Veenman, 1984). For many, attending to the immediate, technical aspects of teaching is demanding and participation in outside teacher professional development may be limited. For novices, developing lesson plans, collaborating with others, and becoming competent in classrooms fills their time and occupies their energies (Moore, 2003). Veteran teachers face similar job-related obstacles to professional development. Instructional obligations, and attending to students and parents outside the classroom, often leave little time or energy for professional development experiences. This study describes research on the experiences of preservice teacher candidates and practicing teachers utilizing professional book clubs. Our goal is to explore book clubs as a form of professional development for teacher populations at two different career stages.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Teachers as Active Participants in Guiding Professional Development Opportunities

For many teachers, changes in practice occur through mandated professional development opportunities designed to impact teaching and learning. However, these methods are often lacking in relevancy and leave teachers in the passive position of responding to mandates imposed upon them by others (Hargreaves, 2000; Lieberman, 1995; Sandholtz, 1999). As a result of teachers' limited personal investment in their professional development, ideas that are conceptually and physically removed from individual classrooms become difficult to implement.

The literature is replete with examples of the personal efficacy gained through teacher initiated activities such as dialoging with colleagues, keeping journals, and completing action research (Burbank & Kauchak, 2001, 2003; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) advocate creating professional development opportunities that go beyond skill acquisition. Specifically, they discuss the need for professional development experiences that

encourage teachers to inquire into the specific tasks of teaching (e.g., instructing, assessing, observing, reflecting) in ways that are sustained and supported over time. Key to this type of lasting, systemic change, is the “capacity building” element of professional development where teachers’ examinations of their work move beyond the confines of individual classrooms (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

Professional book clubs are receiving increased attention as one vehicle to accomplish this goal of professional development. Through reading and discussing professional literature in groups, book clubs provide a social and intellectual forum for teachers to share ideas, thoughts, feelings, and reactions (Flood & Lapp, 1994). The goals for professional book clubs are to provide teachers with opportunities to examine their knowledge, beliefs, and practices through reading about alternate perspectives (George, 2002). The professional benefits include the introduction of new ideas into schools, encouraging teachers’ professional ownership of ideas, and providing opportunities to dialogue and compare perspectives.

Reading Response Approaches

What happens when teachers (and readers in general) interact with text? One popular conceptualization, reader response theory, describes the reading experience as a transaction between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 1978). In this transaction the reader creates a very personal, even aesthetic, response to what they are experiencing when they read a text. A second conceptualization, a cognitive-based approach, focuses on the reader’s cognitive understanding of text, minimizing individual interpretations and emphasizing the content in the text (Liang, 2005).

While the two approaches are not mutually exclusive, they suggest different goals and procedures for professional book clubs. Reader response theory focuses on teachers’ personal reactions to texts and suggests that the goal should be to maximize teachers’ affective responses to ideas. It also implies the selection of books based on the reader’s ability to elicit deep, personal emotional responses. Finally, book clubs should be organized to maximize the sharing of personal responses.

The cognitive-based approach focuses more on the ideas in the texts and suggests that the goal should be the acquisition of knowledge and the incorporation of the knowledge into teachers’ professional schemas. It implies the selection of books based upon their ability to build upon, expand, and alter teachers’ conceptual frameworks. Accordingly, book club activities would focus on ways to enhance the construction of new understandings.

Differences between these two approaches have critical implications for the designers of effective professional book clubs. This research explores preservice teacher candidates’ and practicing teachers’ responses to book clubs as a professional development tool. Our study identifies the differences between beginning and

experienced teachers in the manner and depth to which they engage in book clubs as a form of professional development.

Book Club Experiences

A comprehensive study of literacy teachers' perspectives on professional development raises additional questions about professional development and book clubs (Commeyras & DeGroof, 1998). Over half of the literacy teachers surveyed (56%) said they had never participated in an adult book club, while one third said they used book clubs either frequently or very frequently in their classrooms. In addition, while 40% of respondents reported that they frequently encouraged their students to read about people from other cultures using sources outside of the standard curriculum, only 16% had ever participated in a professional book club. Whether these figures suggest a general resistance to book clubs or other obstacles, like time, energy, and accessibility is not clear. The fact that this research was done with literacy professionals, teachers most likely to have been exposed to book clubs either personally or professionally, also raises questions about the availability of professional book clubs to teachers in general. The present study investigated the use of professional book clubs with secondary preservice teacher candidates and practicing teachers from across content areas and at different stages within their careers. One related goal was to determine how the two populations responded to book club participation, both similarly and differently, based on their career stage and teaching experiences.

METHODS AND DATA ANALYSIS

This research used qualitative methods to study the professional development experiences of a cohort of secondary preservice teacher candidates enrolled in an urban, teacher education program as well as practicing teachers who worked in the same clinical sites. The following research questions guided this study:

1. To what extent do the developmental differences among preservice teacher candidates and practicing teachers impact their general receptivity to professional development opportunities in the form of book clubs?
2. What are the differences in the ways in which preservice teacher candidates and practicing teachers respond to professional book clubs that focus on issues of diversity within contemporary classrooms?
3. To what extent does participation in professional book clubs influence long-term professional goals for engaging in collaborative professional development?

Utilizing a seminar format, preservice teacher candidates and practicing teachers participated in separate book clubs. For preservice teacher candidates, the context of a student teaching seminar served as a platform for discussions of the

issues that contribute to teaching in urban schools and diverse learners' needs. Both preservice teacher candidates and practicing teachers were surveyed and interviewed regarding their perspectives on the utility of book clubs as a form of professional development. During a simultaneous year-long program (one for practicing and one for preservice), the following work samples were collected: surveys, interviews, and information from their discussion-based activities for both preservice teacher candidates and practicing teachers.

The qualitative data included analyses of open-ended survey questions, written reflections, and book club discussions. The data were analyzed using open-coding and then examined for emergent themes (Merriam, 1998). As discourses about how readers responded to their texts emerged (Flood & Lapp, 1994; George, 2002; Liang, 2005; Rosenblatt, 1978), themes were identified from discussions, book critiques, and survey data. These themes were then rechecked against the data to ensure consistency across data sources and participants. The course instructor, who also served as a coresearcher on this project, facilitated book club discussions within the context of weekly seminars with preservice teacher candidates. Book discussion guides were used to clarify the preservice teacher candidates' reactions to texts, to unearth their views on the intended audience for texts, and to identify whether the texts impacted the impressions of preservice teacher candidates' thinking about their teaching practices.

The instructor has worked with preservice teacher candidates and practicing teachers in a secondary education program for over a decade. As a course instructor for the preservice teacher candidates in this study, book clubs were included as a reflection tool within the context of an action research seminar. The book clubs were intended to build collaborative professional discussions among educators. A range of texts were chosen with the goal of examining book choices and to identify the ways in which preservice teacher candidates interpreted the content.

The instructor also conducted a separate monthly seminar with practicing teachers over the course of a year. The practicing teachers were those currently working as cooperating teachers or those who had worked with preservice teacher candidates in the past. A state grant provided funds for professional development opportunities for these teachers.

The book club format was used with practicing teachers to promote discussions on topics related to equity in urban schools. The instructor oversaw the professional development experiences of these practicing teachers including facilitating book club discussion and interacting with participants through their written work.

Preservice Teacher Candidates' Book Club Experiences

A group of 24 undergraduate preservice teacher candidates met weekly as a part of a semester-long student teaching seminar. Within the context of book clubs, the

instructor facilitated discussions using a protocol influenced by Critical Friends (National School Reform Faculty (No date)) and the scaffolding and questioning strategies of Descriptive Review (Carini, 1986).

In both the Critical Friends and Descriptive Review methods, a semi-structured series of questions prompted participants to clearly identify key issues in their readings before attempting to problem solve. The course instructor facilitated a process where participants were asked to present a scenario related to questions or a particular circumstance from their readings that applied to their teaching lives. Following the sharing experience, other group members posed questions for clarification and possible solution identification. Each of these methodologies helped the preservice teacher candidates frame problems, identify potential solutions for problem solving, and unearth practical strategies for examining issues in their teaching and related themes from their book club texts.

Preservice teacher candidates selected one of seven books to read and discuss within the context of their weekly seminar meetings. Based on lists provided by the instructor as well as those generated by students, texts chosen by preservice teacher candidates included:

- *Creating emotionally safe schools* by Jane Bluestein (2001)
- *Teaching with love and logic* by Jim Fay and David Funk (1995)
- *Star teachers of children in poverty* by Martin Haberman (1995)
- *Cooperative learning* by Spencer Kagan (1994)
- *A White teacher talks about race* by Julie Landsman (2001)
- *First year urban teacher* by Jessica G. Parenti (2001)
- *The first days of school* by Harry Wong (1998)

A modified jigsaw strategy was used to share book information within the context of the weekly seminar meetings. The jigsaw method (Slavin, 1986) is an instructional strategy where individuals explore information from different perspectives, in this case their perspectives on different books. During the first four weeks of seminars, preservice teacher candidates met with those reading a similar book (i.e., groups of approximately 3-5 students) to share themes and interpretations of their texts. In line with the tenets of a jigsaw approach to cooperative learning, these group members became “experts” on their book content. Within their expert groups they identified questions, developed descriptions of teaching-related issues, and enlisted peer support on how to approach issues in their teaching. Ideas for responding to teaching themes were then shared with classmates. During the remaining four weeks, preservice teacher candidates met in mixed groups with multiple texts represented to present and learn more about the other books read by their peers.

Throughout their student teaching seminar, preservice teacher candidates were also asked to evaluate their book club texts through a series of surveys and small group discussions. Preservice teacher candidates evaluated the quality of their texts, identified a potential audience for these texts, discussed strengths and weaknesses,

and provided additional feedback on their text's role in professional development. An exit survey asked preservice teacher candidates to evaluate their participation as members of a book club.

Practicing Teachers' Book Club Experiences

Twelve volunteer practicing teachers were recruited from the student teaching sites of preservice teacher candidates. A state grant provided funding for stipends to participate in monthly meetings where teachers discussed book club themes and teaching experiences. Of the group of practicing teachers, three were currently serving as direct supervisors of preservice teacher candidates. The experiences of practicing teachers ranged from 7-18 years. Because of logistical challenges, the preservice teacher candidates and practicing teachers met separately and discussed some common books as well as some that differed.

Practicing teachers selected one of five books to read and discuss during monthly meetings held with peers from across two middle schools and a high school over the course of an academic year. Mini workshops and professional development opportunities utilizing formalized discussion trainings provided a venue for professional book club discussions as well as school-based action research projects. Texts chosen by practicing teachers included:

- *Uncertain lives: Children of promise, teachers of hope*, by Robert V. Bullough Jr. (2001)
- *Sheltered content instruction: Teaching English-Language learners with diverse abilities* by Jana Echevarria and Anne Graves (1998)
- *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* by Geneva Gay (2000)
- *Star teachers of children in poverty* by Martin Haberman (1995)
- *A White teacher talks about race* by Julie Landsman (2001)

A modified jigsaw strategy (Slavin, 1986) was also used to share book information within the context of the monthly meetings. As with the preservice teacher candidates, the jigsaw method provided practicing teachers with an opportunity to share their expertise on their individual books within a fairly structured framework. At the end of the school year, practicing teachers from various schools completed a survey and a final analysis paper, and took part in a large group feedback session. Open-ended surveys were designed to evaluate the effectiveness of working with colleagues, to describe the ways in which book clubs could continue as a format for future of professional development, and to evaluate participation in book club activities. Finally, each participating teacher wrote a reflection paper on their experiences with this form of professional development as well as their personal response to their chosen text.

FINDINGS

Analyses of the data revealed several themes both across and between groups. In terms of similarities, the data (1) highlighted the utility of book clubs as a tool for professional development, (2) demonstrated that both groups struggled with logistical issues in finding time and space for professional dialogue, and (3) identified the value of instructor-facilitated book club formats.

Between-group comparisons revealed differences between preservice teacher candidates and practicing teachers. The differences centered on (1) the focus of each group's analysis of the text content and (2) the degree of reflection on current and future practice.

Similarities

Finding one: Utility of book clubs. Both teacher groups cited the following advantages to the book club model of professional development: opportunities to think about and reflect on current practices; a vehicle for increasing teacher dialogue, both within and across school sites; and as a platform to discuss pressing, professional issues in a nonthreatening way. In terms of the latter, both groups mentioned the benefits of discussing professional dilemmas from a larger, less personal perspective yet both groups also found the discussions after reading the books helpful in exploring alternate perspectives and interpretations of events in their own classrooms and schools.

In terms of teaching, one preservice teacher candidate teacher reported, "Working with other teachers collaboratively created a synergy that helped me to look at teaching in ways I hadn't considered...I now examine student motivation, teaching strategies, and accountability differently." Another preservice teacher candidate described her book club discussions as providing "...a fresh new look at teaching in ways that aligned with ideas from our books." She continued, "I discussed problems I've been dealing with, and have concrete examples for solving problems." The books appeared to provide conceptual focal points for preservice teacher candidates to examine their developing instructional expertise.

Without exception, preservice teacher candidates reported that their book club experiences were critical to their development as educators. Preservice teacher candidates reported that book clubs helped to prompt their focus on educational issues, provided a formal prompt for organizing their comments around themes raised in their texts, and as a tool for collaboration with peers. As one preservice teacher candidate reported in a final essay,

It is too easy to fall in the trap of not caring about schools as more than isolated classrooms... You know, the 'us versus them' perception.

With my peers, I'd like to continue to use dialogue and research to inform my practice.

Another preservice teacher candidate commented in an exit interview that the book club format provided a template for discussing issues in teaching. She reported, "Until we completed book club activities I didn't have a lot of ideas on what collaboration [discussing issues with other teachers] would look like." She went on to report, "My views of teaching have expanded." Book club activities fostered the type of dialogue these preservice teacher candidates envisioned; the books being discussed provided an ongoing spring board for sharing. For preservice teacher candidates, discussions were primarily focused on the logistical dimensions of teaching and reflected limited attention to broader issues. Their focus on cognitive interpretations on the direct content raised in their texts reflected an approach to understanding material that was not unexpected given their developmental needs as novices (Berliner, 1994; Liang, 2005).

The book club discussions were also evaluated positively by practicing teachers. Participants felt that dialogue was most effective when they were able to discuss ideas in a focused way over time. Teachers commented that the content of their meetings spilled over into other discussions in their work with colleagues who were not even involved in the book club activities. For these teachers, the book club experience provided an opportunity to extend their professional development beyond the confines of their "official" club meetings. They also felt that the books provided a starting point from which to begin important discussions about teaching and professional dilemmas.

It was perhaps the supportive framework and open dialogue of book clubs that prompted teachers to look beyond the surface messages of texts. As one practicing teacher reported in an exit interview,

The benefit of the book club format provided a forum where teachers had the opportunity to discuss the implications of the text and the meaning behind the message in a manner that allowed people to express their views in an open format where we could agree or disagree without trying to change the opinions of others.

For these practicing teachers, the book club discussions provided a forum for healthy sharing and debate on broader education issues related to policy and opportunities for reflective thinking. For the practicing teachers, discussions were more holistic and extended beyond the procedural discussions of novices. As might be expected given their status as veteran teachers, they were able to apply text themes to contexts and to extend their discussions beyond the basic content themes.

Another practicing teacher reported in her reflection paper that book club activities provided opportunities for "reflective dialogue and the de-privatization of practice." She went on, "The use of book clubs was a less intimidating way of talking about some difficult issues." She furthered, "If we cannot share what we are

really struggling with, our communication becomes superficial and tentative.” The book club format provided a necessary “safety zone” where teachers were not forced to talk about their classrooms or themselves. They could use the ideas in the books as focal points, integrating thoughts about their own experiences when they felt comfortable to do so.

Many teachers at both the preservice and inservice levels discussed their plans to put additional books on their “summer reading lists” based upon their book club experiences. One practicing teacher noted, “Using activities like the book clubs bring together people who are typically isolated from each other.”

For practicing teachers, the book clubs provided a forum for discussions that extended beyond the literal interpretations of their texts in ways that allowed for greater application to their own teaching lives (Rosenblatt, 1978). The levels of reflection for the practicing teachers included long-term planning for next steps that moved beyond their initial foray into examinations of policy and practices within their school settings.

Finding two: Logistical challenges. Both preservice teacher candidates and practicing teachers struggled with logistical issues that challenged their readiness and responsiveness to the book club professional development model. Both mentioned lack of time as a major obstacle to greater teacher collaboration and dialogue. In addition, both groups cited teacher isolation as a major professional challenge.

For practicing teachers, structural components that contributed to the success of book clubs included meeting regularly (although this proved to be challenging), and release time from teaching duties so that teachers could dialogue together. One practicing teacher responded in her exit interview, “Because we were ‘forced’ to meet as members of a book club, I had the opportunity to read books I wouldn’t have considered on my own.” Others mentioned the formal requirements of the book clubs as opportunities to read professional literature which they otherwise would not have had opportunities to review.

When asked how future professional discussions could be encouraged, preservice teacher candidates provided several suggestions. Common preparation periods for conversations, more time to meet with others, and opportunities to observe others trying different strategies were among the suggestions provided. One preservice teacher candidate commented on the need to make professional development more personally relevant and enjoyable. “By using books that teachers choose, collaboration [working with others teachers] can be viewed as painless and actually a lot of fun.” (Exit Survey)

Finding Three: The value of facilitated book clubs. When asked to describe how book clubs could be used most effectively, a preservice teacher candidate noted that book club discussions were not particularly useful when one person dominated the conversation. Another participant suggested the need for a more systematic procedure for sharing books with all members of the class during the jigsaw

activities and not just with their immediate book club peers. Often the format of class discussion provided ample time for preservice teacher candidates to meet in small groups with others reading the same book, but time to share ideas with those reading a different text was more limited and not as effective.

For both groups of teachers, discussions and analyses of texts that related to actual teaching experiences were reviewed as most effective. Teachers at both the preservice and inservice levels mentioned previous involvement in book clubs with less optimal results. Without the direct facilitation provided by the instructor who used guiding questions and feedback opportunities, teachers felt that book club discussions tended to meander. The use of a jigsaw (Slavin, 1986) approach to book club reviews was cited as one useful strategy for learning about the texts of other class members in a formalized manner. One preservice teacher candidate mentioned the structured discussions on text themes were particularly helpful in that they kept teachers focused and “away from tangents” in discussions. Both groups reported benefits of participating in book clubs as a mechanism for increasing discussion among educators within the context of traditional seminars for beginning and practicing teachers. One preservice teacher candidate commented in a reflection paper, “The book clubs allowed us to interact with peers at a sophisticated level.”

Differences

Finding one: Analysis of text. In their reactions to the content of the books, preservice teacher candidates focused more on teachers and instructional strategies; practicing teachers focused more broadly on institutional and organizational factors impacting students and individual differences. The book club format challenged beginning teachers to look at their teaching in new ways. Of the 24 preservice teacher candidates, all participants cited the merit of book clubs as a tool for learning more about teaching through discussions with colleagues.

Regarding student learning, preservice teacher candidates cited an increased awareness of the technical elements of content delivery in their classrooms. As preservice teacher candidates discussed themes from their books they were able to attach practical experiences to the more complex themes raised in their readings. Specifically, they talked about the need for, and challenge of, focusing on students in their classrooms and their struggles, rather than a primary focus on their own instructional challenges. Data from an exit interview illustrated the student focus:

As a beginning teacher it’s almost as if we forget about the students... we must remember that the students are the most important individuals in the classroom... we must begin the day with students and end the day with students.”

The potential for novices to reach beyond their often times myopic view of teaching is promising though must be cultivated and mentored.

While some novices purposefully selected books with a focus on the procedural and technical elements of teaching, the majority of new teachers were very aware of potential limitations of such texts, identifying the ideal audience of these texts for those with limited teaching experience. For example, in response to Kagan's (1994) *Collaborative learning* text, one preservice teacher candidate reported, "It's more for the beginning teacher starting out. Not a teacher who has been teaching for some time." Many preservice teacher candidates commented in a survey on the "easy reading" format of their books. The Kagan (1994), Wong (1998), and Faye and Funk (1995) texts were referred to as the kind of texts one might, "read on an airplane." Practicality had additional limitations. Preservice teacher candidates who read Parenti's (2001) *First year urban teacher* found the text so rudimentary that they recommended the content for substitutes, college freshman or sophomores, or those in volunteer programs such as Americorps.

For practicing teachers, book club discussions moved beyond the technical and more practical elements of their own teaching. Discussions reflected personal examinations of beliefs about schools and classrooms as institutions. As one practicing teacher commented as part of an in-class discussion on Haberman's (1995) *Star teachers of children in poverty*, "I couldn't wait for our group discussion with teachers from other schools." The content of the text provided opportunities for the teacher to examine her own personal beliefs and values. For some this process was appealing, for others threatening. The same teacher reported, "When we met, to my surprise, several teachers were intimidated by the language and message of the book and actually identified themselves as 'failures.'" She went on, "I was so surprised by their negative reactions!" One middle school teacher echoed her surprise at the negative reactions to Haberman's message,

Those who did not find the book helpful focused on the "failure" or "quitter" theme rather than exploring all of the powerful insights Haberman makes...Haberman offers such a powerful critique of general problems of racism and discrimination that we cannot get hung up on his picture of extremes. (Final Essay).

The fact that the book club elicited such significant, personal reactions made it a powerful stimulus for subsequent group discussions. Participants from one middle school requested funds from their administrator to purchase this book for all teachers at their school. One practicing teacher reported, "Because we are the type of school Haberman writes about, all of our teachers need to hear his message." This was a powerful example of a microculture within a school influencing or reculturing the larger organization (Fullan, 2000; Gitlin & Margonis, 1995).

Finding two: Reflection and long-term impact. The data suggest that effective books for preservice teacher candidate book clubs need to balance the theoretical and conceptual with the concrete and practical. Preservice teacher candidates commented on the importance of linking a book's theme with practical application

of the content. As novices, they felt that a book's content should help beginning teachers with their need for organization, getting started in the school year, and knowing how to react to management issues. While more "issue oriented" books such as *Star teachers of children in poverty* (1995) and *Creating emotionally safe schools* (2001) were rated positively, many preservice teacher candidates commented on the need to align beginning teachers' needs with texts where applications to practice were also provided.

Practicing teachers were reflective of existing instructional practices, frequently expressing reservations about their current practices in their schools. Lacking experiential knowledge, preservice teacher candidates were more positive about different books' content and were more enthusiastic about trying new ideas in their classrooms.

For preservice teacher candidates, the long-term impact of participation in professional book club activities was evident in a subsequent e-mail from a preservice teacher from this study:

As you know I'm in my second year of teaching and I wondered if you might give me some ideas on how I might use book clubs with my high school students. I'd like to find out a way to use the books in the way we used them in class. I'm thinking about having my students read Loewen's *Lies my teacher told me: Everything your American history textbook got wrong*.

A follow-up phone conversation revealed this teacher's plan to provide his students with books that, "...provide a real world perspective where the student has choice." He went on, "Equally important is a format where students can talk to each other about issues; that's what I remembered most about the book clubs from our class." Research suggests that many teachers are hesitant to use book clubs in their classes because of lack of exposure to the process (Commeyras & DeGroof, 1998). One unintended outcome of this study was one teacher's willingness to try book clubs in his own classroom.

For practicing teachers, book club conversations often continued beyond the confines of formal meeting, with an emphasis on the meaning and message of texts. One teacher reported in an exit interview,

While time is always a major roadblock for educators, there are ways to get around it... The funding we had to participate in this project is now gone, but our group has decided to use some of our existing Annenberg funds to continue our opportunities for collaboration next year.

Issues related to the interplay between curriculum, instruction, learners' needs, and the contexts of schools were prominent features of discussions that continued beyond the structured meetings of the book club.

IMPLICATIONS

Previous research indicates that when novices are situated in school settings where teachers and school communities support reflection through teacher dialogue and research, their professional development is enhanced (Gitlin et al., 1999). From the feedback provided by preservice teachers candidates in this study, establishing linkages for collaboration should be a primary goal as they begin their careers.

For both groups of teachers, the opportunity to dialogue using the semi-structured formats affiliated with the book clubs allowed for reflection in ways that moved beyond superficial reviews of text. Choice in the texts read, problem posing, and solution seeking within the context of teacher driven dialogue allowed for ownership in their discussions of teachers' work. As a first step, book clubs provide novices with the exposure to professional development that holds the potential for professional opportunities that name and parallel the stories of others. These public articulations provide novices with an awareness of the platforms necessary for systemic change (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Guskey, 2003; Keller, 2003).

The long-term goals of this project were to integrate pre and practicing teachers into multi-level book clubs. Hypothesized benefits included increased opportunities for experienced teacher modeling, access to experienced teachers' thinking on complex instructional issues, and increased dialogue across levels. Initially, because of logistical problems, preservice teacher candidates and practicing teachers met separately. Our long-term goals were to create multi-level book clubs spanning different levels of experience. The results of the study call into question the feasibility of this goal.

The value of differentiated experiences among learners is significant (Tomlinson, 1999) and practicing teachers are no different. Among groups of teachers, collaboration allows teachers from across the experiential continuum to work in tandem in their professional investigations (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003). Equally significant are professional development experiences that are consciously structured in ways that meet the development needs of teachers (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003). Differences in how teachers approach their teaching, their understanding of learners' needs, and professional goal setting simply vary and must be considered when creating professional work experiences for educators. The book choices and reactions of the teacher in our study reveal these differences. While there was some overlap in the texts selected by both groups (e.g., Haberman's (1995) *Star teachers of children in poverty* and Landsman's (2001) *A White teacher talks about race*), preservice teacher candidates tended to focus on the immediate and practical. With this caution noted, our findings also indicate that preservice teacher candidates are able to discriminate between texts that focus too heavily on the practical. Given support and opportunities, we propose that beginning teachers are capable of engaging in more advanced professional development activities.

The goal of having experienced and beginning teachers dialogue about important teacher issues is a valuable one that could benefit teachers at both ends of the experience continuum. Whether developmental differences between novices and practicing teachers will serve as obstacles to dialogue or opportunities for growth for both levels of participants is an empirical question that we are pursuing in current research.

A related question is the relative cognitive and affective benefits of professional book clubs. While previous conceptualizations of texts' effects on readers emphasized cognitive (Liang, 2005), or affective (Rosenblatt, 1978) changes, our results indicate mixed results. For the most part, teachers at both the preservice and inservice levels reacted in a more holistic fashion to the texts, reacting both emotionally and conceptually to the ideas presented though clearly the developmental differences across groups impacted the depth to which teachers were able to examine text-related issues. Whether this was due to the books themselves or the discussion format is not clear.

Many preservice teacher education programs attempt to integrate experienced teachers in the professional development activities of novices through activities such as action research (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003). Book clubs provide groups of teachers with opportunities for discussion and substantive interactions by systematically scaffolding dialogue within the context of school communities. Further, the experiential knowledge (Gitlin, Burbank, & Kauchak, 2005) of teachers is validated through the process of publicly articulating the complexities of teaching and learning and working together to generate support for the shared effort in recognizing and problem-solving to address these complexities. However, data from this study suggest that we must be deliberate in the manner in which we bridge professional development efforts at the preservice level, to the day-to-day work of teachers in classrooms.

This study relates to other work examining small-scale investigations within the context of wider professional communities (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003; Kirschner, Dickinson, & Blosser, 1996; Ross, Rolheiser, & Hogaboam-Gray, 1999). While adequate as an initial foray into the merits of professional book clubs, a limitation of the present study was determining whether teacher investigations resulted in an "educational good" (Gitlin & Margonis, 1995). That is, future research should investigate whether working with others in book clubs resulted in long-term outcomes as preservice and practicing teachers facilitated their professional development within school communities. Needed are studies examining the long-term effects of professional book clubs as well as fine-grained analyses of changes in teaching practice.

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