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Introduction

During the beginning of her second year of teaching, Teri (pseudonym), one of my former undergraduate students, invited me to serve as a guest reader for her middle grade students in a rural, east Tennessee school. At the end of the same school year, she again contacted me—this time in regards to an idea for her own professional growth for the upcoming school year. She exclaimed, "My students just aren't doing well. I need help" (personal conversation).

Review of the literature

After reviewing the literature regarding professional development, I discovered that "…intensive and sustained efforts over a period of time are more likely to be effective in improving instruction than intermittent workshops with no follow up mechanisms…" (Wei, R.C., Darling-Hammands, L., Andree, A., Richardson, N., & Orphanos, S., 2009, p. 58). Furthermore, a position statement issued by the National Middle School Association (NMSA, 2004) suggests a "… link between staff development and increased student achievement" and that effective PDs gave teachers the "…opportunities for discussion, reflection, and follow up." Although not unexpected, no studies were found that involved explicitly modeling for teachers pre-selected reading and writing strategies with their own students and in their own classrooms over an extended period of time.

Identification of the focus for the PD

Before discussing what areas Teri wanted to address in her PD, I reviewed the position statements from the International Reading Association (IRA). Specifically, IRA suggests that "[T]eachers and administrators must…evaluate methods and programs through the lens of their particular school and classroom settings. They must determine if the instructional strategies and routines that are central to the materials are a good match for the children they teach" (www.reading.org). With this in mind, I decided to empower Teri to direct her own PD and, as a result, based on her students' standardized test scores and the School Improvement Plan (SPI), Teri targeted two areas for growth—the teaching of vocabulary and reading comprehension—via reading and writing strategies. Having provided her with a list of strategies targeting vocabulary and reading comprehension, Teri then decided upon six of these for me to target when developing her PD. These targeted areas included strategies involving think alouds, graphic organizers, self-selection of words, word walls, dramatization of words, and word sorts (Roe, Smith, & Burns, 2011). After each model lesson concluded, with at least one of the previously listed strategies included, Teri was then responsible for using the strategy with her students across content areas.

Questions

Throughout the implementation of the study, the following three questions guided the research and the design of the PD: (1) How will modeling for specific comprehension strategies influence teaching? (2) How will modeling specific literacy strategies affect student learning? and (3) How will scaffolding for the teacher affect student attitude toward reading?

The Plan for intervention

Having served as Teri's instructor in a reading methods course, I recognized our potential to work together toward a common literacy goal. I was, therefore, persuaded to try something "radical" in the world of professional development. Over a period of approximately 9 months—September to May—I would apply what I learned about professional development from the literature review, and I would model for Teri the teaching of pre-selected literacy strategies with her own students in her designated classroom. Ultimately, I would visit her classroom between one and three hours on at least one Friday each month, and the number of visits would depend on weather-related school closings, the school calendar, and our own schedules. After each visit, we would follow up with one another by phone or, whenever possible, through face-to-face meetings during lunch or her planning time. We also e-mailed and/or talked with each other on the phone during the time between my visits. While I, too, conveyed my desire for Teri to keep a reflective journal, she insisted that she simply did not have time for professional journaling. However, she assured me that she understood the importance of reflective practices and pointed out that our telephone conversations and e-mails between visits would provide her with avenues for reflection.

During the implementation of the PD, I would also collect data including pre-surveys, post surveys, and interviews with the teacher and students, student work, as well as student assessments already in place. The data collection would help determine the success of the intervention.

Strategy modeling

In the first PD lessons I taught, I modeled using think alouds as well a Venn diagram. Because Teri cautioned that any reading or writing activity was a difficult sell with her students, I also modeled using picture books, hoping to motivate Teri's middle school students. Murphy (2009) lends support for this type of endeavor by suggesting that "Picture books are effective teaching tools in middle level classrooms... They appeal to early adolescent students because of their interesting artwork, accessible language, and brief text, which stimulate enjoyment" (p. 24). Also, as Yopp and Yopp (2007) pointed out, "Research by Haynes and Ahrens revealed that printed texts—including children's books—contained more rare words than language used in adult and children's television programs and adult conversations" (p. 157). Because of the vocabulary, humor, and differing points of view featured, I chose the following books—*The Wolf's Story* (Forward, 2007), *The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad*

Pig (Trivizas, 1997), and *The True Story of the Big, Bad Wolf* (Scieszka, 1989). I later used the picture books *Voices in the Park* (Brown, 1998) and *The Empty Pot* (Demi, 1990) to model the teaching of vocabulary and reading comprehension skills. I, too, introduced her students to the following novels: *The Teacher's Funeral* (Peck, 2004)*, Al Capone Does My Shirts* (Choldenko, 2004)*, The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1971)*, Walk Two Moons* (Creech, 1994)*,* and *Love That Dog* (Creech, 2001).

Although Teri had not previously used novels with her students, with her consent, I provided the class with multiple copies of the previously mentioned novels via my personal library and a used bookstore. At different times throughout the study, I introduced novels through the teaching of one or more of the pre-selected strategies.

When introducing one of the first novels, *The Teacher's Funeral*, I pre-taught vocabulary which allowed me to model the strategy of self-selecting words. I modeled choosing words that intrigued me or words that I thought the students might now know. For example, to pre-teach the word "manicotti" from *Al Capone Does My Shirts,* I introduced a word wall and a second graphic organizer, adopted from the Frayer model (Frayer, D., Frederick, W. C., and Klausmeier, H. J., 1969). I provided students with several copies of the graphic organizer and encouraged them to self-select vocabulary from any of their readings and to record the words on the sheet. To deepen comprehension, students also created character maps similar to those found at www.ReadWriteThink.org (2013).

With the novels, I also specifically modeled dramatizing words such as "rigor mortis" and engaged students in physically acting out words to help better understand word meanings. I, too, introduced word sorts, both open and closed, to pre-teach vocabulary as well as to examine word structures and definitions.

In addition, I provided students with a graphic organizer, namely a predict-o-gram (Blachowicz and Fisher, 2002). This graphic organizer not only encouraged students to make predictions about a story, specifically *The Empty Pot*, it also engaged the tactile learners because they were required, after writing given word on a separate slip of paper, to physically place the words in the appropriate area of the chart. The use of the graphic organizer also provided for social interaction because students worked on their chart in pairs, defending their predictions or placement of the words both before and after the reading of the story.

Another graphic organizer I modeled was the anticipation guide that requires students to provide evidence from the story to support their responses. I adapted one from www.ReadWriteThink.org to specifically use with the picture book, *Fly Away Home* (Bunting, 1993). For students who were reluctant to share their thinking out loud, this provided another avenue for students to prepare or organize their thoughts before sharing.

With Teri continuing to point out that her students were reluctant writers, I decided to introduce them to the writing of poetry. We began with *Love That Dog* and, as I had suspected, several of the students said they identified with the main character's dislike of poetry. The class then participated in a grand conversation where we discussed the pros and cons of reading and writing poetry.

In my next classroom visit, Teri and I performed a poem for two voices, and her students were hooked! They took turns reading from *Joyful Noise* and *I Am Phoenix*, both by Paul Fleischman (1998, 1999).

Later, in science class, I modeled reading a non-fiction text about owls, as well as identifying text features and key points, in an online source, *The Owl Pages* (http://www.owlpages.com/articles.php?section=owl+physiology&title=digestion). I also modeled asking questions to assess student reading comprehension: Students identified the main idea of the article and made inferences regarding owl behaviors. In addition, I modeled using context clues to decode what the author meant by "regurgitation" as well as "prey" and, in pairs, we even dissected owl pellets. Then, I pulled out *Joyful Noise* once more and shared that, as a class, we were going to write a poem for two voices, focusing on owls. From there, students, on their own and in pairs, began writing poems for two voices during class time and outside of class time.

On still another day, I modeled writing a poem using George Ella Lyon's (1999) *Where I'm From* format. After listening to the podcast of the author reading her poem, *Where I'm From*, students talked about how they related to the poem: They shared that all but one had grown up in the Appalachian area just as George Ella Lyon. With unanticipated enthusiasm, students worked on their own poems, using the format for *Where I'm From* and an *I Am* format found on an interactive website (http://ettcweb.lr.k12.nj.us/forms/iampoem.htm). Some students even opted to share their poems out loud. When reading the following poems, Teri's own enthusiasm and pride for her students was evident in her question: "*My* students wrote these?"

I Am From

I'm from family reunions and playing guitars

I'm from moving and cookouts

And from shooting guns

I'm from "*Thunder is God bowling''* and "*Sleep tight don't let the bed bugs bite'',* and "*Pain is weakness leaving the body*."

I'm from bluegrass music playing.

I'm from [East Tennessee] and [I'm] part Cherokee.

I'm from chicken and banana puddin'…

I Am From

I am from the cell phone, a big screen TV, and dirty dishes.

I am from comfortable rooms, good smells. I am from the rose in the garden and the [big] oak tree.

I am from having fun and hazel eyes, from [Nona and Kathleen].

I'm from partying and cleaning and from hanging out.

I'm from *don't drink* and *don't do drugs* and *If You're Happy and You Know It*.

I'm from Christmas dinner and East Tennessee, cherry pie, and cotton candy…

Later in the year we took our writing to another level while engaging in a small multi-genre report centering on the nonfiction story *Mailing May* (Tunnell, 2000). As a class we made a word wall for the book and talked about possible genres to use in telling the nonfiction story from different perspectives.

While discussing multi-genre reports, students soon realized that in order to successfully write the multi-genre pieces, they needed to know more about the era in which May lived, train transportation, and even what she might have seen or experienced on her journey to her grandmother's home. As a result, students conducted research and wrote pieces from the perspective of many of the characters in *Mailing May*. For example, students wrote personal letters from the perspective of May and her grandmother as well as a telegram from the perspective of May's father. One student even wrote an essay comparing the type of locomotive in the story to the magnetic trains used in Japan.

Reflective practice

After my classroom visits, Teri and I discussed aspects of my lessons that unfolded smoothly as well as those that did not go as planned. We also discussed follow up lessons that Teri had implemented or would provide as well as ideas to promote student use of the modeled strategies. Teri specifically talked about using the modeled strategies across the curriculum and shared, after the completion of the PD, that it was these times of reflection and discussing specific lessons and results with another person she would miss the most.

Findings

Question One: How will modeling for the classroom teacher specific comprehension strategies influence her teaching?

First, according to Teri, she now uses vocabulary strategies more often and across content areas. In an informal conversation, she shared that talking with her students about connections with the text, especially those involving vocabulary, are now part of their routine. Evidence collected in field notes supports her claim: "During her lunch break, the teacher talks about how she now plans to use the strategies not only in her language arts classes, but also in social studies and science classes" (field notes). At another time, Teri shared that she instructed students in history to use Venn diagrams to compare the Old Stone Age to the New Stone Age (field notes).

Second, Teri credits the modeling of vocabulary instruction with the fact that she and her students are reading more and that she is using an increased number of instructional strategies. For example, at the beginning of the intervention she reflects, "Since [she] began working with my students, we have put up a word wall. The students really like the word wall…[and] are now looking for words that they do not know" (personal correspondence). In the post-survey she identifies the word wall as a previously unused strategy: "I did not have one [word wall] before. In addition, I am having the students write down words in stories that they do not know… and…[create] semantic map[s]" (teacher survey).

Third, Teri shares that she has plans to use specific strategies where before she did not: In the middle of modeling word sorts, the teacher commented that she planned to use this same strategy with their spelling words later in the week (field notes). She also stated her intention to use multi-genre reports in an upcoming language arts unit (personal conversation).

Fourth, Teri shares some specific effects of having vocabulary strategies modeled for her with her students:

[Her]….research was a great opportunity for me to observe how to model for my students. Not only was it a great review of strategies, I also learned some new strategies. One of the most important benefits for me was it brought back my love for teaching reading and teaching it in the correct manner. Since I teach all subjects for three grade levels, my days are overflowing. I have to rush and cut corners when and where I can. Sometimes, it has been "read this story and do the exercise at the end." That is a terrible way to teach reading! [Her] research was a gentle reminder of the importance of teaching reading" (personal correspondence).

Along with using more and different literacy strategies, Teri, too, acknowledges that

"This has renewed my love for teaching…and reading" (personal correspondence). She also mentions that she became more aware of reflecting on her teaching practices because she knew I was likely to question her about any newly acquired insights. She, too, states that I provided a much-appreciated sounding board: "I'm so excited to have somebody to talk to about all of this" (personal correspondence). In one of her last e-mails regarding the project, Teri additionally shares that her "main research goal, the effectiveness of modeling reading strategies for teachers, was very successful. I am now using more strategies, I am modeling for my students, and I love teaching reading again" (personal correspondence).

Question Two: How will modeling specific literacy strategies influence student literacy outcomes?

Teri reflected in an e-mail that students were positively impacted by the modeling of specific literacy strategies: "My students want to read more novels…Also, students [who] would never ask me for a definition of a word, are doing so" (personal correspondence). In addition, Teri said that some students were using the strategies without her first mentioning them. For example, she shared that one student volunteered to record words, from the readings that he and his peers did not know. She, too, pointed out that another student complained when specific words had not yet been added to the word wall and that she had overheard students referring to the word wall as they completed writing assignments (field notes). Moreover, in a student interview, one student indicated that she now applied what she did in class to authentic reading experiences: "I compare things… like we did with those Venn diagrams. What's in the shampoo and conditioner…?"

Additional evidence from field notes suggests that students are now taking more ownership of their learning.

For example one student commented, "We need to put these words on the word wall" (field notes). Comparison of the student pre- and post-surveys also provide evidence: In the pre-test, one student out of seven said that she wrote down a word that she did not know, but in the post survey four out of seven said that they now use this technique. Also, in the beginning only three out of seven said they looked up word meanings and now all seven out of seven students indicate they use the computer to find word definitions (student survey).

Question Three: How will scaffolding for the teacher affect students' attitudes toward reading and writing?

In the following statement, Teri reflected on her students' attitudes toward unknown words: "They are now looking for words that they do not know. I believe they want to plaster our classroom walls with words!" She also recalled, when no one knew the definition of "initiative," some students looked up the definition of the word and shared it with the class while another student explained that "…the girl [in the book] took initiative by trying to get a job at the department store." Teri said that still another student suggested that the class place the word "initiative" on the word wall (field notes).

With this type of student participation in mind, Teri insisted that her students' attitudes toward learning improved. For example, she said that "…[I]t [modeling of strategies] has infused my students with interest…" (personal correspondence). Some students, however, were reluctant to acknowledge change in their attitude toward reading. In an exit interview, five students said they read more after the intervention, but only three students said that they like reading more and one student said he read less than before. Another student, even while acknowledging that she read more, qualified her answer: "I like reading a little bit more than I used to. I said a *bit* more".

Amidst a general reluctance in acknowledging the enjoyment of reading, some students admitted that they had discovered unexpected pleasure in reading and/or writing. Specifically, one student commented that she had discovered this year that she "kind of liked" poetry and said "I read everything now…like cereal boxes…shampoo bottles…" (student interview). The same student also revealed, after finding "a little kid's book" on the bus, she read it several times to herself and then read it to her younger neighbor. She specifically added that she read it aloud in different voices "like you did in class" (student interview).

Another student talked about how he currently relates to books: "Now I really think about the facts…what the character does. How he feels throughout the story…who he talks to… who he hangs out with…" (field notes). He also shared his depth of feeling as he connected to characters in a story: "You know, it's like everything that's happened to that character happened to me" (student interview). Still another student talked about reading a book from a series that he chose to read on his own (student interview).

One of the students commented that his attitude toward reading had "changed" and that he read "[m]ore, of course… It's [now] more of a force of habit…you taught me to make connections." He also said he liked to read if… "there is

anything in that subject I can relate to" and that he liked "comparing my life to the book." Another simply said she "relates to books more" (student interview).

Through his actions, still another student indicated that he was now more interested in reading. For example, at one point a student asked if I owned any other books, like *Mailing May*, in which people had been mailed. When I provided him with a copy of *Henry's Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007), Teri and I were both pleasantly surprised when he asked if he could not only keep the book to read but also use the computer to find out more information on his own.

Another rewarding moment came when a student talked about going online to locate information for a bio-poem about Johnny Cash, his hero. After reading *Mailing May*, he also spoke about searching the Internet to learn more about trains and his discovery of magnetic trains in Japan (field notes).

Teri and I took notice when one student volunteered to read aloud a letter she created for a class multi-genre report (field notes). Teri later recalled that this was the first time she remembered the student ever volunteering to share information in class.

On the whole, students commented that they read more often and that they read a greater variety of genres than did before the intervention. Teri also shared that "[M]y students had their self-esteem and their reading levels boosted to a higher level" (personal correspondence).

Conclusions

Findings from this study suggest that the influence of this particular professional development, through the modeling of specific reading strategies targeting vocabulary and comprehension, was a positive experience for Teri and her students. Specifically, evidence from field notes and Teri's own comments indicates that she now uses researched based strategies more often and across content areas. In addition, students' test scores in reading as well as in writing were overall higher and that, on the whole, students perceived reading and writing more positively. According to Cohen and Hill (2000), these results may not be unexpected: They explain that "… studies suggest that when educational improvement is focused on learning and teaching academic content, and when curriculum for improving teaching overlaps with curriculum and assessment for students, teaching practice and student performance are likely to improve" (p. 330).

While additional research is needed to examine the effectiveness of a one-on-one PD design, based on information gathered, this study contributes to the literature in that it offers possible correlations between Teri's PD and teacher use of strategies, the PD and student attitude toward reading, as well as the PD and student academic progress. Perhaps, Teri's final comments best reflect the findings regarding Teri's PD: "…not only are my students learning, I am learning as well. This has renewed my love for teaching… and reading, and it has infused my students with interest. This in itself is a BIG accomplishment."

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