

Chapter 5: Professional Dialogue as Professional Development

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Bechtel and O'Sullivan (in press) suggest that teacher change within the context of professional development (PD) is influenced by the design and content of PD initiatives. This paper examines the influence of an initiative designed to stimulate reflection and discussion among experienced teachers. It has been argued in the physical education literature (Ward & Doutis, 1999) and in the larger field of educational reform (e.g., Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996) that efforts to encourage reflection and conversation by teachers about their profession ought to be a key outcome of any effort designed to improve or sustain a culture of professionalism. Such conversations serve as "records of practice" (Borko, 2004; Craig, 2004) that may support and encourage teachers to attempt changes (e.g., Gay & Ross, 1994; Ward & Doutis, 1999).

Although reflection and professional dialogue may in turn act as a functional element in promoting educational change and student learning, we know very little about the nature of teacher dialogue and the ways in which teachers' willingness or capacity to change is reflected in and through dialogue when provided opportunities to engage in professional conversations with peers. "What do teachers talk about?" "How do they talk about it?" "How do such conversations impact practice?" Interesting work is being done in this field by Craig (2004) following a narrative-inquiry tradition of Clandinin and Connelly (1995). Craig looked at how teachers' knowledge communities can support the development of teachers' personal practical knowledge (i.e., teachers' knowledge, practices and ideas) and

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teachers' professional knowledge landscapes (i.e., the contexts in which teachers' practical knowledge is created).

Understanding the nature and function of dialogue requires an understanding of the data generated through talk. Smith and Sparkes (2005) suggest that in addition to conversation and narrative analysis, discourse analysis provides a means through which data generated through talk can be interpreted. Theoretically, discourse analysis is aligned with a sociocultural perspective that accepts that learning is both situated within and mediated by action that includes involvement with cultural tools. Language, as captured in text, is seen as a cultural tool that inevitably transforms the learning process as people interact socially and subsequently act and move in directions that would otherwise not occur (Wertsch et al., 1995). Learning is therefore situated because "the cultural forms that come to inhabit the individual depend upon the place, the social position, from which the individual engages with others in activities, in practice" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 176). From this perspective, language is embedded within and representative of particular discourses that serve to represent how and what we think about ourselves and our relationships and "it is this connection between discourses and social reality that they constitute that makes discourse analysis a powerful method for studying social phenomena" (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 5).

Collins (1999) suggests that discourse analysis affords us an opportunity to examine social change in two ways. First, it "alerts us to shifts and changes in the social contexts that give rise to generic forms of speech" (p. 75). Second, discourse (i.e., the expression of an individual's ideas in language) can impact change, and "this is because the contexts which give rise to particular utterances are frequently conflictual, and these conflicts are also registered within utterances" (Collins, 1999, p. 75).

In this study we have attempted to create a space and time in the otherwise frenzied world of teachers, allowing them the opportunity for what Craig (2004) describes as "narrative spaces ripe for teachers' self-initiated conversations to occur" (p. 420). Our focus is to more fully understand what teachers talk about when provided time to engage with topics and issues of interest to them and how teachers talk about these topics in relation to themselves, their practice, and others. Specifically, we sought to examine the nature of the PD discourse among teachers as they engaged in a PD activity called *PEP-Talk*.

Our discourse analysis is informed by the work of Bakhtin (1981, 1986). Bakhtin discourse analysis uses the utterances bound by their contexts as the unit of analysis. "Utterances are concrete speech acts spoken by living subjects from a particular social and historical location" (Collins, 1999, p. 74). Extending the Vygotskian notion that language and learning interconnect through social interaction, Bakhtin's (1986) work assumes a theoretical perspective that accepts that "speech forms—social languages and speech genres—[are] neither neutral with regard to values and world views nor a simple means of expressing thoughts, leaving off the subtexts of power and stratification" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 177). All language therefore is used to communicate power and authority. As well, in his interpretation of dialogue, Bakhtin (1986) recognizes that past events and views are always being reinterpreted and changed in our current conversations and thus meanings are constantly changing. He called this the *unfinished nature of meaning* (Bakhtin, 1986). At any given time, "truth is arrived at by dialogical action

mediated through the ‘taking of positions’ and the ‘making of assertions’ located in specific ‘fields of culture’” (Roberts, 2004, p. 94).

Accepting the connection between language, ideology, and power and a concomitant willingness to understand how power and dominance are produced in social practice and reflected in text through interactions is to examine discourse from a critical perspective (Smith & Sparkes, 2005). A critical discourse analysis grounded within a Bakhtinian perspective seems particularly relevant for analyzing the influence of power and dominance in physical education. There is a substantive literature documenting the marginal status of physical education as a subject matter in the context of schooling (e.g., Bell, 1986; O’Sullivan, Siedentop & Tannehill 1994; Solmon, Worthy, & Carter, 1993; Templin, Sparkes, Grant, & Schempp, 1994; Williams & Williamson, 1995). This literature indicates that physical education teachers become marginalized members in the school community because of the status of their subject matter, and because the subject matter outcomes are of less importance or unimportant to the goals of the school. Power is differentially conferred in terms of status. The lower the status of a subject, the less bargaining power teachers have in a school (Sparkes, Templin, & Schempp, 1993). Conversely, teachers of higher status subjects, within contractual limitations, often get reduced teaching loads, increased planning time, are allocated para-professionals for assistance, in some instances have higher salaries (Bloom & Browne, 1994; Evans & Williams, 1989; Sparkes et al., 1993), and have more PD opportunities as is the case in Columbus Public Schools (CPS) and many other districts across the country. This “status” is manifested in teacher dialogue that is illustrated in how teachers negotiate past and current meanings of their work within the social context of their colleagues.

Method

Participants

Participants were a volunteer sample of physical education teachers from the Columbus, Ohio, school district who agreed to meet on six occasions (once per month) for a 90-min discussion at a local eatery. Participants were solicited through e-mails and flyers that were delivered to all district schools. Participants were paid \$10 per hour, and a small stipend for equipment was made available contingent upon their attendance at four of the six PEP-Talk discussions. Seventeen teachers were in attendance on a regular basis. This group included male and female teachers from elementary and middle schools, the majority of whom had at least 10 years of teaching experience.

Overview of PEP-Talk

PEP-Talk was designed specifically to enhance the existing community of practice that had developed as a result of ongoing districtwide PD efforts through two consecutive and interrelated Physical Education for Progress (PEP) grants. PEP-Talk was designed to bring teachers together in an after-school social setting to talk about issues confronting them in their roles as teachers. The goal was to create an opportunity for teachers to share their teaching ideas and practices, to reflect and

interact with topics of importance to them and directed mostly toward aspects of their teaching lives over which they had control. Specifically, researchers were interested in examining two research questions: what issues teachers wanted to discuss, and how they chose to talk about these issues.

Discussion Protocol

Five strategies were used across the sessions to help teachers maintain their focus on the content or topic under discussion. First, we built in time (15 min) for teachers to engage in social conversations when they arrived and preceding the introduction of the topics for discussion that evening. During this time there were appetizers and drinks available to aid in setting the social context for the professional conversations to come. Next, we used a small group discussion format each evening designed to provide choice for the teachers as to what topics they would like to discuss. Typically, there were three or four simultaneous small group discussions occurring. Third, we asked each group for a volunteer facilitator who was then charged with ensuring that the conversation occurring at the table was distributed and stayed on point. Fourth, to assist the facilitator in maintaining the focus of the discussion, we provided two laminated cards that contained a series of questions that each group was to work through in discussing their topic. One series of questions provided guidelines if the topic was content focused and a second if the content was focused on other issues, such as liability (see Table 1). Finally, we created a small flag that had Back to the Content written on it. Any member of the group was able to pick up the flag at anytime should they feel the conversation had diverged from the original intent.

Data Collection

Data collection included audiotapes of the large group and small group discussions that took place during each of the six evenings. Tape recorders were placed on the table with each working group at the beginning of each evening. Data sources also included field notes, artifacts brought by the participants to the sessions (i.e., assessment instruments, activities), artifacts created by the participants while in attendance during the final evening (group presentations), and two participant questionnaires. The first questionnaire asked teachers about the topics they would like to discuss and the second asked about their participation. These secondary data sources served to triangulate findings.

Data Analysis

The audiotapes of the PEP-Talk sessions were transcribed verbatim. The texts were analyzed by coding each conversation along three dimensions that encompassed both a word level of analysis and an analysis of relations between teachers and professional contexts. The first dimension was the primary topic of the discussion—how it began and evolved through the dialogue. Simply put, it was what the teachers talked about. The second dimension examined how the topic was discussed. For example, the topic of assessment was discussed relative to the types of assessment (peer, informal, formal), teachers' need for assessment, difficulties with assessment, or the resources available to assist with assessment. The third dimension examined

Table 1 Questions Guiding the Topic Discussions

Content-focused questions	Questions not related to content
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why is this topic of interest? 2. What kind of information about this topic would help improve your program? 3. What activities in your program address this topic? 4. How do you deliver these activities? 5. Do you know anyone who does this as well? 6. Have you seen any good resources related to the topic? 7. Is there anything that you would like to do/use in your own program? 8. Is this topic worth a continued discussion and if so what is the question or challenge you would like to put before the group? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why did you bring this topic to the table? 2. What are the issues about this topic you would like discussed? 3. How does this relate to you, your program, or profession? 4. What is the “so what” question about this topic? 5. Have you seen any good resources related to this topic? 6. Is there anything you would like to do/use in your own program? 7. Is this topic worth a continued discussion and if so what is the question or challenge you would like to put before the group?

the valence of the discussion or how teachers positioned their comments either positively, negatively, or neutrally in terms of who was inscribed with power. Continuing with the assessment example, teachers talked about the positive influence of peer assessment on students, but also talked about the difficulties in using peer assessment and the necessity of assessment data to justify their physical education programs to parents. The former represents a positive valence, the latter two negative valences. Data were then inductively analyzed to identify emergent themes. Because teachers self selected the discussion groups they engaged in each evening, and often moved from one group to another, we do not report the data relative to individual identifiers.

Trustworthiness of the findings was established in two ways. First, constant comparison and peer debriefing (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) were used to triangulate the data gathered from the interviews and a document analysis of the secondary data sources. Second, the authors knew these teachers well because they had sustained contact with them from previous PD activities and from the teachers' involvement with student teachers. This afforded the researchers insight into not just the teachers as individuals but with the contexts within which they worked.

Findings

Findings relative to research Question 1—what did teachers want to talk about—showed that teachers wanted to discuss a variety of concrete topics. These included assessment, liability issues, equipment needs within physical education programs, management strategies, classroom lessons when no gym is available, and strategies for dealing with difficult students.

Data that emerged when considering research Question 2—how did teachers choose to talk about these issues—provides the substance of the findings and the ensuing discussion because it subsumes Question 1. Through an examination of the three dimensions used to analyze the discussions, the discourse analysis revealed an ongoing tension between teachers feeling powerless in their role as physical educators yet feeling a sense of power as content specialists. This tension was evidenced from the way in which teachers positioned their sense of narrative authority (Craig, 2004) in relation to what issues they chose to discuss and how they talked about issues that arose. Powerlessness was reflected in the ways in which teachers discussed the topics brought to the PEP-Talk sessions and how they described their practices during these discussions. Teachers described how they consistently sought to justify their programs to parents and principals and described how they attempted to overcome perceptions and policies that limited their ability to overcome their marginalization in the school system. Engaging in conversation with a group of similarly interested peers empowered teachers in their role as content specialists by providing them with opportunities to share, discuss, and learn new strategies for dealing with issues important to them. Their expanding knowledge base was not simply tied to increasing instructional or managerial repertoires, but a fine grain analysis showed it was tied to reclaiming their professional power and authority. Rather than accepting their marginal positions and assuming nothing could change in their schools, teachers sought new strategies that might facilitate and sustain change. The essential tension of empowerment and powerlessness emerged both within teachers' descriptions of their practice and as they engaged in discussion.

Descriptions Are Not Just Descriptions

The tensions between feeling at once empowered and powerless were embedded within the discussion of various topics that often included detailed descriptions of the teachers' own practices. Upon examination of both the word level of analysis and the analysis of relations related to the topics brought to the floor, the findings showed that these descriptions reflected an implicit level of subject matter knowledge and yet were part of a discussion imbued with the teachers ascribing power to parents, administrators, and other teachers within their buildings.

This tension and the ways in which it appears within the text are best illustrated through an examination of the discussion surrounding assessment. The teachers chose assessment as a topic and willingly brought examples of assessment instruments to be shared during Evening 3 that was devoted entirely to the discussion of assessment. Like much of the discussion throughout the sessions, the dialogue at each table (i.e., discussion groups) most often included detailed descriptions of assessments and how they were currently being used. There was little evidence of teachers' engaging in a critical discussion relative to the appropriate choice or use of assessments for particular students or curriculum objectives. The following example is a typical description:

I usually do like a three-point rubric. Like right now we're doing with the 4th and 5th graders, volleyball. . . . There were three things I was looking for. Hands together, bent knees, square to the ball. If they're doing all three things they get a three. . . . So it's easy to kind of, I just look up. I see a student doing it, ok, good job, you know three, three. And I kind of walk about the room giving feedback too. If someone's had a two, I'll tell them what they need to do to correct that and get a three.

The teachers talked about different types of assessments that could be categorized as formal and informal and located within the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. The preceding quote is an example of a teacher explaining a psychomotor assessment using a formalized assessment rubric. In the next example, the description includes an informal assessment within the affective domain.

I use a class behavior chart. It's on the wall, and you can either get a gold sticker, green sticker, or a red sticker. Gold is best and red is at the bottom and green's in the middle. And I would just kind of reinforce that. Like this is not gold sticker. Red, this is green. Kind of work our way back up. And at the end you compete against the grade levels. Grade levels compete against the other classes in their grade level.

Often the dialogue that surrounded these types of descriptions was neutral in terms of its valence or ascribed power and included questions directly related to how the assessment was administered as reflected in the following typical exchange.

“[Did] they write their names at the top?”

“Yeah, their names, and they worked in the same teams each time they come in.”

“Did everyone get checks the whole way?”

“Yes.”

“Were they accurate or did they just go check, check, check?”

The Essential Tension Embedded Within Discussion

The second finding that emerged was that discourses surrounding assessment were not focused on student learning, but on how teachers use assessment to justify their programs to parents and administrators. Most often these discussions had a negative valence since the need to provide justificatory evidence ascribes power to the parent or the school administration. Had the discourse surrounding assessment been, for example, centered on the need to ensure student learning and therefore teaching effectiveness, power would have been ascribed to the teacher.

Although Bakhtin (1981) suggests that a particular subject position is articulated less through explicit statements and more through the orchestration or juxtaposition of voices, the data showed examples of both. Sometimes teachers were very explicit in explaining their desire to learn new strategies in order to justify their practices to parents and administrators, but most often, their justifications of assessment developed as the dialogue evolved. As multiple teachers spoke, power emerged in how teachers positioned themselves within the dialogue.

The following example came in response to the group being asked by a researcher why they chose assessment for discussion. The example illustrates the types of comments that appear consistently throughout the discussion of assessment in relation to providing justification to parents.

I wanted more options to show parents exactly what their child is being graded on. I have some now, but sometimes we do these ones, and those ones. Sometimes it's written stuff, sometimes I don't. And they, you know, they're always the ones that question to the hilt. They want to see exactly where it's at, so I thought this one would benefit the most.

In contrast, the following excerpt demonstrates how assessment in relation to parents is articulated through the orchestration of multiple teachers' voices. This exchange occurred on the first night when assessment was discussed rather than on Evening 3 that was centered on assessment:

I get challenged every quarter. If it's C or lower, I get challenged. . . . I mean I have an affective grade, I have a cognitive grade, and then I have physical grades. I mean I have three different things that I'm looking for every quarter, and it's on a four-point rubric scale. And every day that they walk in my gym, they can have four points. But they have to follow directions, and they have to listen when I'm talking, and they have to play safely. I mean those are three basic things that they have to do. The fourth point is a bonus, you know.

“So do you have rubrics for each unit?”

“Mostly, yeah.”

“And those are, if you're getting challenged, the parents come, and—”

“Oh, oh yeah. I pull it out. I mean I’m like, here’s this, and here’s this, and here’s this.”

“Right. And then they have to [get] so many points to get the A, the B—”

“Right.”

“Why’d they get that? Oh I don’t know. Oh. And there are some parents that come in, and they say how’d they get a U in gym? All you do is play. And they have no, they have no idea of what goes on. And you’ve got to have something to back it up. And—”

“I keep track of everything. I keep track of where the kids are, or are not following directions. I keep track of time outs. I keep track of kids who are good sports, and the kids who are not good sports. I, I keep track of kids who help out other children. I give out things to people who are on task. . . . And that way, in case a parent ever comes in, and says oh, we addressed this many times, they were absent this many times, and I say, I had to send them out for this, this, and this, and I have the reasons why. So if a parent were to come in to me, I would have everything right there. I mean I couldn’t just give a grade S-U, or S-1, or O-1, I still have the reasons why they got that . . . I keep track of everything that I do.”

Beyond Assessment: The Tension Continues

Although the role of parents was most robust within discussions about assessment, the power ascribed to parents extended to other topics raised by the teachers and was often subtly embedded within their discourse as they made sometimes small references to their justificatory motivation. During a discussion in which teachers were explaining their excitement when pedometers were introduced, for example, one teacher explained that, “I just pull them out and, you know, look what we’ve got. We’re going to use these. That in turn gets the word to the parents. . . .”

The power ascribed to parents also extended to administrators and schoolwide policies. Just as assessment was forwarded as a topic for discussion in order to provide teachers with more options of justifying their programs to parents, the topic of liability was forwarded because teachers felt vulnerable to litigation in spite of their best efforts to ensure safe teaching environments. In spite of their concerns over safety and the actions they took to ensure safe lessons, teachers perceived themselves to be somewhat powerless because administrators failed to act on their behalf, institutional policies hindered solutions, and there was an ever-present threat of parental litigation. Once again, the threat of litigation was the reason this topic was forwarded by participants. When asked directly why they had selected this topic for discussion, the following response was given.

I see in the hallways. I see on the playground. And as soon as we go on duty at 8:15, I think we’re liable for a lot of things that go on. And I think that there are so many times, you know, like at our school. There are so many kids running the halls. And I feel like I’m a negative person if I stop to try to tell them to

go outside even though it's 8:00. And they're there that early. But if I let that child stay and something happens to them, I'm going to be held liable. And that bothers me. Right now the administration is not being real helpful because when it's cold, you know, the teachers go on duty at a certain time. And she lets the kids in 5 or 10 min earlier. . . . So who's responsible for those kids in the hallway? Today, my teaching my partner was not there . . . but, you know, he had a male sub for first period. Huge fight in the girls' locker room. So I've got make sure all of the girls are dressed before I can even go in there. Cause I don't want anybody coming back saying . . . So I've got to wait. By the time I get in there, you know, one girl's nose was completely busted open and there's blood everywhere in the locker room. So I see the principal there in the hallway, and she said what happened? We can't get anybody in there because we can't go in there. She's going, well, why didn't you tell me that there was no . . . I said, you know what, I'm not turning in a sub . . . I told the assistant principal that this person was not there, that we don't have a female sub. She said, no, you've got to tell me. Cause right now this is on you. And the parents want to press charges. Well, I'm not supposed to be in there. . . .

As the discussion continued, the focus shifted from a focus on administration to a focus on parents:

I think we're in a society, especially parents, they want to blame someone. And a lot of people do not want to take responsibility for things. And they want to point a finger. They want to blame people for things. . . . And, you know, we try to keep an environment that's safe and, you know, you still can't control a lot of things that happen. So we're [PE teachers] the first person to get the finger pointed at them.

I thought that was a good point when you mentioned control, if the student is lacking self-control. And I think many times it comes back to the educator as to what were you doing that the student was not on task. And you want to say if I knew that I would probably be a millionaire. However, I had my lesson set up. . . . So you go through all of the steps that you are supposed to have. And they are still not complying. And, like you said, self-control. The finger is pointed at that. What are you doing to prevent this?

As the discussion moved forward, a variety of liability issues and frustrations emerged and they most often were punctuated by a powerlessness that resulted from lack of support for changes the teachers knew were required. In a lengthy discussion, teachers talked about the dangers that arose when a substitute teacher was called in for the day. The teacher who opened the discussion described a bad experience with a substitute teacher and did so in the context of presenting a solution to the problem, suggesting that an investigation found that "there's a form that principals can fill out, or come to me and I fill out and it says this person is not a phys-ed sub. Please do not allow this person back into the gym because of safety reasons." The following excerpt occurred after the opening comment.

"I had a similar problem last week. And it's so corny. We were talking about our kids and then knowing our rules. And my kids told the sub, we're not

allowed to play that. We're not, you know. OK. I was out for two days. And my sub played dodge ball. With a brick wall behind the kids [played] dodge ball. Now I left explicit detailed directions from the time they walked in to the time they walked out. Here's what I want done. And I even have extra lessons if you don't like this one. Here's five more lessons."

"I had the same thing happen on our DARE PD, on that day. I had everything down, the jump ropes, and let that person know. Well, we didn't do that because the kids seemed bored. Well, I did the same thing with the 5th graders the next day, and the kids loved it. I even did an assessment on the kids, whether or not they liked the lesson. And they said . . ."

"I know but she didn't do what I asked."

"Right. You know that they do something unsafe and someone reports that to me. We can [know] who did that."

"Actually, I was out Monday. I saw the Art teacher at dinner. And she was like, she goes, I know you didn't do it but let me just ask. Did you leave dodge ball as your plan for [the substitute]? Are you kidding me? Seriously. She's like, I know you didn't. She knows that we're not even supposed to play that. I'm like, no, I mean, this is the Art teacher that knows that we're not suppose to play dodge ball. And so, I'm like, fuming now. And so I go in on the first day I got back and went straight to my principal. And I said, I've already had complaints. Every teacher I've seen has said something about my sub for Monday and Tuesday. No attendance was taken. No notes were left for me. I said, and I know that she played dodge ball with all my kids. And she said, yeah. You know, I get the, well you know, if they don't feel comfortable with your lesson plan. . . I said there were five other lesson plans in my folder. You can't tell me she couldn't have had something in my folder that she could teach.

"Is there a policy . . . ?

"No. And she even . . ."

"No."

"My principal walked by and saw them playing that. And still let that continue. And I said I don't ever want this person in my room again. Well, we can't really . . . I said, what's the next step 'cause I want to file something so I don't ever have this person. She said she had nothing. We had no recourse. . . . You can't tell me there's no recourse."

"There's recourse. Because when one of the subs, when they grab a student or something like that they get pulled. So there has to be the same thing. . . ."

"The principal. . . . She didn't have a sub. She said how many teachers have you had?"

"Yeah. And they're all screaming 'cause they haven't had their break time. . . ."

"But the part that fooled me was that she even . . . You know, you walk by and you see that happening. Why don't you stop it and say where are the plans? Show me something else that you're going to do with these kids instead of that. Get out the jump ropes. Something."

"I have the same thing that you do. I have my lesson plans that I want them to cover. And I say, if these are not working for you, please try this. But if that doesn't work there are index cards on my desk that you may look at and use."

A similar discussion ensued when teachers began to talk about the lack of information that flowed from the school nurses to physical educators about health problems that could influence student participation. Teachers described instances in which they had not been informed of particular health issues and the consequent lack of communication either had, or had the potential to, put the student at risk and open the physical educator to liabilities. Just as teachers had shared their own assessment instruments during the PEP-Talk sessions, teachers willingly generated solutions to the problem. The following example illustrates how the discussion regarding the lack of communication arose and solutions to the problem emerged as teachers described their own experiences and frustrations:

"He could do push-ups just with his legs crossed and do the upper body stuff. And the one principal says don't do it and the other's saying, well, he should have it. And I'm just going, I'm stuck. Cause if something happens. . . ."

"So do you know of any good resources for P.E.? I mean, has anybody. . . ?"

"I liked your idea. I mean, you were saying when [Laurie] was talking, that, you know, if we're not, why don't we have a district form that goes home with the rest of the stuff the very first day of school?"

"Not just one school to another. . . ."

"I think it's a very good idea."

"Almost like a medical. . . . A liability, medical [form] . . ."

"Seems like there should be a form."

"Something."

"And, of course, you're getting into different legal issues."

"Right. Well, because, now you don't ever know if you could actually have asthma or not. You know, [the pupil has said] I don't feel like running today. So, guess what. I have asthma. When you've never heard anything about this kid. Even on the nurse's list, having it. You know, I have my list from the nurse. But I have kids who are never on that list saying, you know, I'm huffing and puffing. I don't feel good today. I'm tired. I'm not, you know, I don't want to run."

“Right. And I ask them do they have an inhaler here at school, or if they have one at home if I don’t have any information.”

“But this has been the best nurse we’ve had. And, of course, we’re going to cut back her days next year because of the budget. And it’s like, I think there ought to be at least a district wide paper because all of these kids go from school to school in [this district]. And then they come back to you again. And that way, when that form goes, that’s where we can go get that student, where ever they go.”

Whether teachers talked about assessment in relation to parental pressures, liability in relation to ill-prepared substitute teachers, or failure to receive student medical information, they were rendered powerless within their schools. This was in contrast to the expertise they brought to the discussion. The discourse analysis showed that several teachers knew how to create and implement multiple assessment strategies across the three learning domains, and both identify problems and posit workable solutions related to liability even though their voices might not be heard by their principals or parents or their ideas implemented by their school administration. Talking about these issues and generating solutions allowed teachers to move from a powerless position on the periphery of their schools to feeling empowered as content specialists as they shared their expertise with their colleagues. Perhaps, in the end, it was their acceptance of each other as experts that prevented any substantial critique of the ideas brought forward.

Conclusions

Schools and school districts are bureaucratic institutions. In educational bureaucracies, like most bureaucracies, power is typically hierarchically organized. As outlined in chapter 1, urban contexts have a number of challenges including large educational bureaucracies. As a result, physical education teachers are often far removed from influencing the policies and the resultant practices of the district, and even further removed in those schools in which principals are not supportive (Ward, 1999b). As the literature of marginalization of the field attests, teachers and students are often recipients of both intended and unintended consequences of these policies (e.g., O’Sullivan et al., 1994; Solmon et al., 1993; Sparkes et al., 1993; Stroot, 1996; Templin, 1989; Templin et al., 1994; Williams & Williamson, 1995). Many of these policies serve to present barriers to the professional growth of teachers and their programs by excluding physical education from expectations of student achievement that are the norm for core subject matters such as reading or math.

Faced with such conditions, teachers can either accept the status quo or engage in practices to challenge the hegemonic operation of power. We use this term *hegemonic operation of power* to refer to the subordination of beliefs and views of teachers about their subject matter as a result of their acceptance and compliance with district policies. Teachers do have some power over the content and pedagogy they use within the limitations of these policies. In this sense they can make the best of the space they occupy (i.e., their gymnasiums). But often a physical educa-

tion teacher's space is isolated from other professionals within the school (Ward & O'Sullivan, 1998) and from their subject matter colleagues in other schools, as a result of limited PD opportunities (Ward & Doutis, 1999).

Teachers often lack opportunities to reflect on their work and challenge the hegemonic operation of power in the presence of others who may be able to act as critical friends. Whether one calls these gatherings *communities of practice* (Lave & Wenger, 1991), *teacher learning communities* (Borko, 2004), *knowledge communities* (Craig, 2004), or some other term, their function is to inform, empower, support, and improve the practices of teachers. There is increasing evidence that when teachers collaborate in such communities they are more willing to take risks, reflect on their failures, and share successful programs and practices (Craig, 2004; Little, 2002). Little (2002) notes that

Conditions for improving teaching and learning are strengthened when teachers collectively question ineffective teaching routines, examine new conceptions of teaching and learning, find generative means to acknowledge and respond to difference and conflict, and engage in actively in supporting professional growth. (p. 917).

Craig (2004) observes that teachers not only need to discuss teaching with others but most importantly to engage in critical dialogue about their work and teaching circumstances. It is in finding such safe and supportive communities that teachers can have space "to reflect on accumulated contextual experiences, particularly those related to public policy" (p. 422). She argues such dialogue allows teachers to challenge existing practices and policies and test the limits of their own professional powers. The 17 teachers who met over the course of the year in PEP-Talk represent a sample of teachers who, in one sense, may be seen to have acted in ways to empower themselves. Rather than accepting their marginal positions and assuming nothing could change in their schools, teachers sought new strategies that might facilitate change within their own teaching spaces and reached out to their peers for support. Throughout PEP-Talk, teachers relied on their own expertise rather than expecting university faculty to provide answers or direct the discussion. Teachers willingly shared their own practices and sought advice from peers and from the university staff who were there to support their efforts. They felt comfortable and confident enough in the presence of their peers to discuss things they were doing well and importantly, some of their professional struggles.

The discussion protocols used to maintain a focus on the topic under discussion might well have contributed to these findings. Rather than allowing teachers to become entrenched in sharing their complaints, the focus was on generating goal-directed discussion. Accepting that simply bringing teachers together to talk does not always result in substantive discussion or change was an important consideration.

Although certainly PEP-Talk provided the opportunity for such a discourse, this willingness to engage with colleagues may also have been the result of the on-going PD efforts in the district that have continued to build credibility and trust among teachers and university faculty. Thus, in our view, it would be wrong to interpret PEP-Talk only as the cause of this level of willingness to exchange and share ideas, but we suggest that the PEP-Talk format provided an opportunity to do

so. In short, PEP-Talk was socially and culturally bound to the current and recently completed PD initiative and the relationships those efforts had established among the university faculty and teachers.

Implications

It is axiomatic in the cooperative learning literature that simply putting students together will not in and of itself result in either cooperation or student achievement of lesson outcomes. Similarly, in our view, merely putting teachers together will not result in productive discourses or substantive actions to improve their teaching contexts. As we have mentioned, PEP-Talk was socially and culturally bound to the existing and immediately preceding PD practices and relationships among the university faculty and teachers. Anyone who had worked with teachers knows that it takes time for trust and credibility to be established and it is equally true that it takes less time for that trust and credibility to be lost. Thus, one implication of projects like PEP-Talk is that they need to be more longitudinal in nature. Teachers also need to know that such arrangements as PEP-Talk are not principally research projects, but rather are part of ongoing commitment and efforts to support them. This clearly has implications for how teacher education programs interact with schools, but also has the potential to be quite limiting. For example, how feasible is it for a teacher education program to support multiple school districts using a model that requires considerable time commitment from faculty?

In this study we used the activity called *PEP-Talk* as a context for teachers gathering to dialogue. There have been other contexts that have been used, including book clubs (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001), critical friends groups (Dunn, Nave & Lewis, 2000), and regular before- and after-school curriculum meetings (Ward, 1999a). It is unclear from the literature whether an outside facilitator (e.g., university faculty member) is necessary for such dialogue. There are examples of both the involvement and noninvolvement of an outsider in the literature. It is also not clear how often or for how long such meetings might occur and what measures should be used over what time frame to judge their impact on teaching and teachers in complicated and bureaucratic urban systems of education.

Final Comments

We recognize that there is no evidence presented that would demonstrate that teachers changed practices as a result of their involvement in PEP-Talk. This certainly ought to be a goal of future research. At the time this study was conducted, our goal was to examine a strategy that would allow us to bring teachers together from across the district and from two related, but different PD initiatives to focus on professional issues confronting them in their jobs. We believed then, as we do now, that without this type of communication more substantive efforts at reform will ultimately struggle because teachers will lack voice.

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