PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TEACHER LEARNING:

THE ADVANCED PLACEMENT® WORLD HISTORY READING EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

Within an educational landscape of rapidly changing demographics, high-states accountability, and demands for reform, teachers of core content areas such as social studies, are facing the need for quality professional growth experiences. Teachers are rarely consulted about their professional growth needs and traditional forms of professional development experiences have generally not been very successful in improving teacher knowledge or student success. Building upon research in quality professional growth for educators, the authors of this study sought to critically examine one form of professional development for teachers of Advanced Placement World History® (APWH), participation in the Advanced Placement® World History Reading (Scoring). This was a qualitative case study involving focus group interviews of secondary APWH teachers serving as readers who scored the three APWH exam essays. The findings from this study indicated that participation in the process of scoring essays at the APWH Reading was a beneficial experience for participants, providing both an increase in content knowledge and pedagogical skills for working with APWH students, and demonstrating a quality professional growth experience for participants.

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Introduction

Quality professional development is a critical issue facing all educators. However, with the recent emphasis on preparing students to be career and college ready, providing quality professional development for teachers in both content knowledge and pedagogy that will impact student success in entry level college courses is of particular importance.

Traditional ideas about professional development have supported the practice of having outside experts provide one-time, pre-packaged, one-size-fits-all presentations to teachers on topics chosen by school administrators (Colbert, Brown, Choi, & Thomas, 2008; Patton & Parker, 2015; Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). Teachers are rarely consulted about their professional growth needs and traditional forms of professional development experiences have generally not been very successful in improving teacher knowledge or student success (Grimm, Kaufman, & Doty, 2014; Wei et al., 2009). To move beyond this "pre-packaged" approach and develop a program of professional development that meets the needs of both teachers and students, requires school leaders to recognize what research has shown as quality, effective professional growth. Recent evidence suggests that quality professional growth may be either formal or informal in nature, and is characterized as being collaborative, intensive and on-going, directly related to local classroom practice and student

learning, and participant-driven (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Desimone, 2011; Hill, Beisiegel, & Jacob, 2013; Wayne, Yoon, Zhu, Cronen, & Garet, 2008; Wei et al., 2009).

The purpose of this study was to critically examine the role of the Advanced Placement World History Reading (Scoring) as a quality professional development experience for secondary teachers of Advanced Placement World History (APWH). This was a qualitative case study involving focus group interviews of APWH teachers serving as readers who scored the three APWH exam essays.
The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What types of professional development do APWH readers find to be the most supportive of the teaching/learning process in the Advanced Placement classroom?

2. Does the APWH reading serve as a quality professional development experience for participants?

Theoretical Framework

Educator professional development is a dynamic medium for building a community of P-16 educators focused on meeting the challenges inherent in twenty-first century schools. Educators facing rapidly changing demographics, high stakes-testing, demands for reform, and the need to master new skills in order to better impact a diverse student population are finding a renewed need for quality professional growth (Haug & Sands, 2013). The *sine qua non* for innovative educational reform is the professional support and training of those classroom teachers leading the classroom learning transformation. Although recent trends in teacher professional development have begun to move away from generic training of large groups of teachers to engaging teachers in reflective practice, traditional professional development experiences still remain the norm and demonstrate little success in improving teacher knowledge

or student success (Easton, 2008; Guskey, 2002; McAdams, 2008; Patton & Parker, 2015; Starkey, Yates, Meyer, Hall, Taylor, Stevens, & Tola, 2009; Wei et al., 2009).

The ownership for the individual teacher's professional growth cannot be left to campus and district "one size fits all" approaches. Instead, teachers need to be engaged in a multifaceted approach with diverse opportunities for content-specific professional development relevant to their classroom needs (Koretz, 2008; Patton & Parker, 2015).

Advanced Placement Program

Although a search of the literature on the Advanced Placement program reveals studies evaluating student participation and its impact on student success in college there are few studies that examine the impact of teacher participation, particularly in the scoring of AP exams (Gandara, Orfield, & Horn, 2006; Klopfenstein & Thomas, 2009: Laitusis, 2012; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002). Educators who teach Advanced Placement courses are usually required to participate in generic district and campus staff development but often these trainings offer little real support for the challenges they face delivering college-level curriculum to high school students, especially in the area of developing writing skills in students, an increasing number of whom are considered to be non-traditional students who struggle with writing tasks. According to College Board data, the impact of participation in the Advanced Placement program for low SES students is significant when discussing access to college-level curriculum:

Low-income graduates accounted for 27.5 percent of those who took at least one AP Exam in the class of 2013, compared to 11.4 percent in the class of 2003. A total of 275,864 low-income graduates in the class of 2013 took at least one AP Exam during high school, which is more than four times the number of low-income graduates who took an AP Exam in the class of 2003. (College Board, n.d.j, para. 3)

An additional reason for examining professional development for AP teachers is apparent when looking at the participation in and impact of the Advanced Placement program in the United States. The number of students involved in the Advanced Placement program has steadily increased since the inception of the program in 1955, with over forty-six million students participating in at least one AP exam between 1956 and 2013 (College Board, (n.d.j, para. 3). According to data from College Board, "33.2 percent of all U.S. public high school graduates in the class of 2013 took an AP exam at some point in high school compared to 18.9 percent in 2003" (College Board, (n.d.j, para. 3). Data suggests that this trend will only continue with the corresponding need for increased numbers of highly qualified teachers.

Quality Professional Development

Although research into what constitutes effective or quality professional development expanded in the 1990s, empirical studies that reported the impact of teacher professional development experiences on classroom instruction and student learning were few (Corcoran, 1995; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). By 2001, the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) delineated acceptable standards for quality professional development and grouped the standards into three categories: Context (involving learning communities, leadership and resources), Process (involving collaboration, research-based experiences and data collection), and Content (involving equity and quality teaching). NSDC's indexing of these standards provided a link to research into each descriptor's relationship to best practices in professional development. Studies over the next few years would support many of these standards.

For example, in 2001, Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon analyzed data from a national study of math and science teachers which indicated a relationship between different kinds of professional development experiences and self-reported change in knowledge and

classroom practice. The results of their study revealed that effective professional development that impacted teacher knowledge and skill involved three key characteristics: an emphasis on content, active learning by the teacher participant, and a substantial number of contact hours over a longer duration of time (Garet, et al., 2001).

  Content Focus. More recent studies seem to support the findings of earlier researchers such as Garet, et al., (2001) about the significance of content-specific professional growth experiences (Desimone, 2009). Saunders, Goldenburg, & Gallimore (2009) found that content-specific professional development improved student achievement while studies by Darling-Hammond et al., (2009), Patton & Parker, (2015), and William (2007) reported that teachers prefer professional development that emphasizes content that is meaningful to their classroom. Other studies indicated that much more content-based professional development was needed (Koretz, 2008). As Lee and Buxton (2013) summarized, "A content focus highlights the need for professional development activities that concentrate on subject matter content, how students learn that content, and how to increase teacher content-related knowledge and skills to support students' achievement" (112).

  Intensity and Duration. Another critical feature of quality professional development identified in several research studies relates to both the intensity and duration of the professional development experience. A study by Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi and Gallagher (2007) indicated that professional development experiences that are short, (i.e., one-day presentations) are not effective in providing teachers time to process information and accomplish little in enhancing teacher practice, while research by Wei et al., (2009) suggested that professional development that was sustained and intensive was much more effective. In fact, studies by Desmone (2009), Garet et al., (2001), Guskey, (2000), Guskey & Yoon, (2009), Yoon, Duncan,

Lees, Scarloss, and Shapley (2007), all found that educators need to spend at least twenty to thirty hours on the professional development to be effective.

Collective and Collaborative Participation. Research also suggests that educators benefit from the collective wisdom of their colleagues within a community of learners (Dufour, 2014). In 2002, Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon and Birman found that professional development was more effective when there is collective participation as well as active learning opportunities for participation. Dufour & Marzano (2011) also demonstrated that professional development, accomplished through associations with colleagues, can nurture a potent professional learning community. This process of reflexive inquiry as a community of learners manifests itself "as teachers develop common goals, share instructional materials, and exchange ideas and experiences arising from a common context" (Lee & Buxton, 2013, p. 113). Studies also suggest that this professional learning community can be located within a teacher's own school or department, or with other educators who teach the same subject area (Dufour, 2004; Dufour & Marzano, 2011; Fulton & Britton, 2011).

Active Learning. Active learning by participants engaged in authentic experiences is another characteristic of quality professional growth experiences that has been cited in several studies (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; O'Sullivan & Deglau, (2006); Patton et al., (2012); Van Veen, 2012). Wei et al., (2009) reported that effective professional development occurred when teachers were actively involved in the experience, whether that experience was through professional learning communities or other forms of collaboration. As Blythe (2014) stated, "During the professional development program, teachers need the opportunity to experience the content as both the teacher and as students would in their classrooms" (p. 60). Teachers are provided opportunities to actually engage in learning that is authentic to the

==highlight==classroom, such as teaching, analyzing student work, assessment, etc. (Blythe 2014;).== Professional development thus driven will look first at the needs of the classroom teacher (Beswick, 2014).==

Informal and Non-formal Learning.

Research suggests that learning can take place in a variety of settings (Cross, 2006; Merriam, 2007). Although these different types of learning experiences have been categorized in the education literature as formal, informal, and non-formal education by some researchers (Eaton, 2010), others have suggested that a continuum from formal to informal would be more accurate, as elements of each sometimes seem to overlap (Henze, 1992). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, informal and non-formal learning was defined as the process in which people acquire and accumulate knowledge, skills, attitudes, and insights from experiences including structured activities sponsored by community, state, and national organizations (Cross, 2007; Eaton, 2010; Merriam, 2007).

Recent studies have suggested that not all professional development is necessarily attained through the formal offerings provided by the teacher's district and/or campus, nor perhaps should it be (Patton & Parker, 2015). Less formalized and more loosely structured professional development can be the unintended outgrowth of teachers' involvements outside the schoolhouse. In fact, professional growth opportunities in the twenty-first century present themselves in a variety of situations whether they are attached to highly structured and focused trainings, professional conferences, webinars, social media, or dialoguing with colleagues on pedagogical issues critical to the profession (Rutherford, 2012). This latter approach for professional growth is often embedded in both formal and informal educational experiences and in networking with colleagues in a variety of situations.

Valuing all forms of professional development whether internal to the organization, provided by outside specialists, or resulting from collegial networks can also aid in the attainment of the district's professional development vision. To move beyond a "pre-packaged" approach and develop into a community of learners requires school leaders to recognize alternative delivery of professional development which provides multiple opportunities to meet teacher needs. As Rust and Freidus (2001) explained, "[The] process of facilitating change. . . is in itself a form of discovery learning whereby new understandings are shaped by the interchange of inside and outside, and by old and new experiences and habits of the mind" (p. 11).

Teacher Choice. While most school districts and even states require teachers to take part in yearly professional development activities for the intended purpose of improving practice, "it is often the case that teachers are not involved in selecting the activities in which they participate" (Colbert, Brown, Choi & Thomas, 2008, p. 140). In fact, the implementation of No Child Left Behind legislation "created a professional development system that did not allow teachers to utilize their professional judgment to determine their own professional development needs or make decisions regarding what professional growth activities are relevant to their classrooms" (Colbert, Brown, Choi & Thomas, 2008, pp.136-137). However, recent research suggests that providing opportunities for teachers to participate in making decisions about professional development increases the success of the experience (Armour and Yelling, 2007; Darling-Hammond and Richardson, 2009; Deglau & O'Sullivan, 2006; Parker, Patton, Madden, & Sinclair, 2010).

One example of teacher choice in professional development is offered by College Board and the AP Program. Many AP teachers voluntarily choose to attend professional development venues provided by colleges, universities, and regional College Board affiliates. These

professional development experiences usually take the form of one or two-day workshops, or five-day summer institutes, all designed to meet the professional needs of Advanced Placement teachers in specific content areas. In May 2015, there were 121 such professional development opportunities for AP World History teachers listed on the College Board website which began in May 2015 and continues until March 2016. (College Board, n.d.g)

Another form of voluntary professional development for AP teachers that this study sought to examine was that of the Advanced Placement Reading where the essay portion of the student exams are scored. College Board describes this experience for educators as giving AP readers a chance to: "exchange ideas with faculty, teachers and AP Development Committee member and establish friendships within a worldwide network of faculty members" (College Board, n.d.i, para. 2). The Advanced Placement Readings are held at six locations around the country during the first two weeks of June after the AP exams are given in May. In 2014, over 12,000 high school and college faculty read and scored approximately 4.2 million exams (College Board, n.d.f).

A Transformative Experience.

In describing the experiences of select readers at the APWH Reading, the authors agree with Daley (2000) and Mezirow (1997) who explained that certain events outside the realm of formal education act as change agents in the lives of professionals, thereby producing a transformative learning experience for participants. Mezirow (1997) elaborated on this idea of a transformative learning experience by explaining that the structure of the experience includes "critical reflection, discourse [with other professionals] and action" (p. 60). This study proposes that AP readers have made changes in their practice based on the knowledge and skills acquired at the APWH Reading and have experienced a process similar to that described by Mezirow.

Background

The Advanced Placement Program

According to information on the College Board website, The College Board organization, founded in 1900, is a major support system in preparing college-bound students through programs of rigorous instruction in the nation's schools (College Board, n.d.a). Significant among these offerings is the Advanced Placement program which is designed to provide high school students with an array of rigorous college-level courses. These courses, and the national exams based on the courses, have been collaboratively designed by university professors and experienced content area teachers (College Board, n.d.c).

The Advanced Placement exams are administered by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) for the College Board. These end-of-course assessments are administered on a national scale and are designed to assess students in terms of the knowledge and skills acquired in certain content areas. "More than 3,600 U.S. and international colleges and universities annually receive AP Exam scores. Most four-year colleges in the United States provide credit and/or advanced placement for qualifying scores." (College Board, n.d.b, para. 3).

Advanced Placement exams are scored at various locations around the United States. They are referred to as AP Readings and educators who score the exams are referred as readers and include exceptional university, community college, and high school teachers. They are selected by the Chief Reader of each Advanced Placement subject after an application process to ETS that requires that college-level faculty "be active faculty members who have taught at least one semester of a comparable AP course" and participating high school teachers "who currently teach the AP course in a face-to-face classroom setting and have at least three years' experience teaching it" (College Board, n.d.i , para. 1 & 2). Readers are assigned to a particular table with a

table leader, an experienced reader whose initial job is to train the six to eight readers at his/her table in the operational rubric as a scoring guideline. Table leaders are appointed by the lead administrator or Chief Reader after a process of evaluation and recommendation from his/her previous Table Leader. Throughout the reading, table leaders monitor the quality of readers' scores through a process of back-reading and dialogues with each reader (College Board, n.d.j).

The scoring process begins with the Chief Reader appointing a question leader and small groups of experienced table leaders for each of the three essay questions. The main purpose of these groups, referred to as the sample selection groups, is to formulate an operational rubric for that particular question, using the standard generic rubric printed in the College Board scope and sequence for that course as the model. The operational rubric is developed through a two-step process. Initially, a sample of 100 to 200 student essays is chosen by the Educational Testing Service staff from a range of AP exam student submissions for that year. These sample essays are then sent to each question leader for initial analysis at which time he/she creates a first draft of the operational rubric (College Board, n.d.e).

Next, question leaders and sample selectors arrive at the reading site prior to the actual scoring to further develop and refine the operational rubric. This process involves discussion and further analysis of a larger sample size of that year's submitted student essays. The sample selection group also chooses exemplar student papers to represent a range of scores for explicit use in teaching the finer points of the rubric. These exemplars demonstrate what constitutes an acceptable thesis, analysis, supporting evidence, and other required aspects of the scoring rubric. After the operational rubric is finalized, the question leaders and sample selectors train the table leaders who, in turn, train the readers assigned to their tables (College Board, n.d.d).

Every student essay is hand-scored according to the operational rubric. For example, at the 2014 APWH Reading, readers scored essays from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. each day for seven consecutive days, with one hour and fifteen minutes for lunch and a fifteen minute break in the morning and in the afternoon, over 49 hours over the course of the week. Individual readers may score between 500 and 2000 student essays during the course of the reading and are expected to become familiar with all parts of the scoring process. This allows readers to be able to assess what constitutes unacceptable, acceptable, and exemplary responses for one or more essay questions. For each AP Exam, there is a formula for combining the scores for the multiple-choice and free-response [essay] sections or subsections into a maximum weighted score. The overall score for each AP exam is on a scale of 5-1 as detailed in Table 1 (College Board, n.d.d).

Place Table 1 here

The number of APWH exams has dramatically increased from 21,000 in the initial year of 2002 to over 245,699 exams scored in June of 2014, according to the College Board Annual AP Program Summary Report (College Board, n.d.h). The free-response section of the world history end-of course examination is divided into three essays: A 50-minute document-based question preceded by a 10-minute reading and planning period, 40-minute continuity-and change-over-time essay question, and a 40-minute comparative essay question (College Board, n.d.d). Each reader is trained to score one of the three essay questions of the exam and then the scores for all three essays are combined with the student's score on the multiple choice section of the exam to create a composite score (College Board, n.d.f).

All AP Chief Readers and Test Development committees work with the Educational Testing Service (ETS) to align reader assessment for the course with university-level scoring through inter-rater reliability comparability studies. "Definitions of the knowledge and skills required to earn scores of 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 on an AP Exam are derived from standard settings and college comparability studies that take place annually. These processes ensure that AP Exam outcomes align with college faculty expectations" (College Board, n.d.d, para, 2). This is an on-going and systematic process to ensure essays are scored fairly and equitably.

Methodology

This qualitative case study employed focus groups to determine the perspectives of teachers regarding participation in the APWH Reading as a viable form of professional development. Focus groups are used to explore a specific set of phenomena among a group of individuals who share similar group characteristics and allows for interaction between participants to facilitate more nuanced exploration of ideas (Krueger & Casey, 2014). This study was exploratory, aimed at understanding how teachers construct meaning out of an informal learning experience (Burke, 2013; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011).

Participants

Two groups of secondary APWH teachers participating in the APWH Reading [scoring] experience in Ft. Collins, Colorado, volunteered to participate in the study. Focus group interviews took place over two consecutive days and were held in the evening after the scoring of APWH exams had been completed each day. The setting was a meeting room in a dormitory of the university where the APWH Reading [scoring] was taking place.

Participants were divided into two groups based on years of experience scoring APWH exams. The first focus group was composed of five experienced readers assigned as table leaders

with five or more years' experience in reading or scoring student essays and at least two years serving as a table leader. The second focus group consisted of six teachers considered to be novice readers with zero to four years of experience in reading or scoring student essays. The purpose of using two focus groups based on years of experience scoring exams was twofold: (1) to analyze the effect, if any, experience in scoring had on participant perception of the value of the scoring experience; and (2) to analyze the effect, if any, experience in being a table leader had on participant perception of the value of the scoring experience. The size of each focus group was less than ten members in keeping with the recommendation of Krueger & Casey (2014) to keep the membership of focus groups between six and nine participants.

Questions 1 to 6 of the interview protocol were designed to elicit basic demographic data which revealed the following information about focus group participants. Of the eleven teachers, two taught in private schools and nine in public schools. Seven of the eleven teachers held a Master's degree in education and one has a Master's degree in history. Of the remaining three teachers, two hold Bachelor's degrees, one in history and one in criminal justice, and one teacher had a Ph.D. in world history. There was a wide variation among the participants in years of experience teaching world history, ranging from two to twenty-seven years. The mean number of years of experience teaching world history for participants in focus group one was sixteen, while the mean number of years of experience teaching world history in focus group two was 4.5. The variation among participants in the number of years teaching APWH was smaller due to the newness of the course, ranging from two to nine years of experience. The mean number of years of experience teaching APWH for participants in focus group one was 7.8 years, while the mean number of years of experience teaching APWH for participants in focus group two was 3.5 years.

The authors developed a focus group protocol to guide the interview process (see Appendix A). The information shared by the participants was audio-recorded and later transcribed. Participants in the audio-recording were not identifiable by name or recognizable in any way in the completed published research. Participants were asked to sign an Informed Consent form which acknowledged their agreement to freely participate and provided them the opportunity to leave the focus group at any point without penalty. Participants were asked to offer their perspectives and opinions related to a set of discussion question prompts regarding professional development for APWH teachers. Information gleaned from the transcripts formed the basis for recommendations of programmatic approaches and professional development for teachers specific to increasing student success in APWH.

One of the authors acted as the focus group facilitator. The facilitator possessed a skill set that included what Fern (2001) described as "desirable personal characteristics" and "professional qualifications" (p. 73). The personal characteristics included what Axelrod (1979), as cited in Fern (2001), defined as "being a good listener, having an interest in people, having a dynamic personality, being warm, being involved in one's work, and believing in one's work" (p. 75). These interpersonal qualities were coupled with the facilitator's professional experience as an APWH teacher, APWH exam reader, APWH table leader, and as a secondary education professor. It is this expert consultant role that contributed to the groups' trust because the facilitator was truly an expert who had built a high level of respect with participants. The principal investigator conducted the interviews and acted as the facilitator for the two groups by asking participants to respond to the question prompts.

Data Collection: Focus Group Discussion Question Prompts

The focus group question prompts consisted of a series of open-ended descriptive questions. Question prompts were developed in order to provide insight into teachers' experiences at the APWH Reading and their perceptions of how their experiences affected their teaching practices. The process for developing the open-ended question prompts for the focus group interviews followed the sequence outlined by Krueger & Casey (2014) and is found in Appendix A as part of the protocol. New questions that emerged during the interview process were also allowed and participants were encouraged to offer additional information as the interviews progressed.

Data Analysis: Findings

Participant responses to all question prompts were analyzed using open and axial coding to identify common responses or themes as suggested by Corbin & Strauss (2008). Researchers identified two common patterns or themes that addressed the original research questions. These themes were identified as (1) the importance of the Advanced Placement reading as a quality professional development experience for focus group participants, in that it enabled participants to obtain specific knowledge and skills relevant to their particular instructional needs, and (2) the benefits of networking and discourse with other professionals at the reading that served as a source of knowledge and skills to improve teacher practice. These two themes are reflected in the responses of both experienced and novice focus groups participants in the initial research questions.

Research Question One: *What types of professional development do APWH readers find to be the most supportive of the teaching/learning process in the Advanced Placement classroom?*

All eleven focus group participants responded that they had previously taken part in professional development activities specifically designed for the APWH course. In particular, all participants had received training in APWH by attending at least one of the College Board's five-day summer institutes, with nine of the eleven participants having attended multiple five-day institutes. Eight of the eleven participants stated that the APWH five-day summer institutes were the best form of professional development they had attended for supporting the teaching/learning process involved in the APWH course. Four participants responded to Question One by also identifying the AP Reading as a professional development activity that supported the teaching/learning process in the APWH classroom. For example, one experienced reader/table leader wrote, "I spend more time writing and working on writing skills because I feel that writing is such a large part of the course" (Experienced reader/table leader D).

Research Question Two: *Does the APWH reading serve as a quality professional development experience for participants?*

When asked in the focus group interview how they would describe the APWH Reading in terms of quality professional development, all eleven participants described the APWH Reading in positive terms. For example, one novice reader stated that, "Some of the top scholars [in world history] come and are very accessible, as well as college professors, high school teachers, the mix-it's great professional development (Novice reader D)." An experienced reader/table leader commented that, "This [experience] is by far the best professional development that you can have for teaching APWH. Not only do you learn exactly how to structure the essays and come up with better ideas for teaching the writing, but you have the collegiality of everyone here" (Experienced reader/table leader B).

Research Question Three. *How does participation in the Advanced Placement reading impact teacher practice?*

Research question three was addressed through a series of question prompts, with each prompt focusing on a specific topic included in teacher practice: knowledge of subject matter, curriculum design, instructional methodology, and assessment. Each participant, regardless of his/her focus group, was asked how, if any, his/her participation in the APWH Reading had affected each of these topics. One of the sub-themes that emerged from the participant responses was the impact of the APWH reading experience on teacher practice in the area of writing instruction; particularly, in curriculum planning, instructional strategies, and assessment of writing skills.

Theme One: Explicit Instruction in Writing

Participants in both focus groups voiced their perspectives on how participation in the APWH Reading experience enabled them to improve their practices through the knowledge they gained of instructional strategies used to explicitly teach writing skills in their world history classes. Novice readers, in particular, emphasized how the experience of scoring students essays helped them to internalize the finer points and essential components of what they had observed at the APWH Reading as an acceptable essay.

- "It's helped me tremendously in regards to staying with the rubric, the thesis statement, and so forth, which I will use when I get back" (Novice reader B).

- "After going to the reading, I saw how much more intense we needed to be. And so I start with writing earlier. I pick it apart. I teach all the document based question components separately and then by October we start bringing it all together. The thesis and just everything is a lot more intense" (Novice reader E).

- "With the change over time question, which is the one that I am [scoring], I will be able to teach it much better because I understand it much better" (Novice reader F).

Theme Two: Professional Collaboration

Another pattern identified from participant responses centered on how the APWH Reading acted as a valuable collaborative networking experience in that it provided opportunities for discourse with a variety of professional educators that research, write, and teach about world history. Novice reader A stated that, "The networking has been tremendous and I have, just in conversation, come across a multitude of resources and different ideas for the classroom, even as far as grading essays and assigning essays and all kinds of class work." An experienced reader/table leader expanded on this by describing the variety of discourse available saying, "I don't know of any other experience where you [teachers] can sit down in a non-classroom, non-standard atmosphere and talk to the authors of [our] textbooks. I would say that 99.9% of high school teachers never get that opportunity" (Experienced reader/table leader A). Another experienced reader/table leader also commented on this saying, "I think that it goes back to that whole idea of the networking and the exchange that you're not going to find in many places" (Experienced reader/table leader E).

Participants also spoke of how these conversations facilitated an exchange of information that participants felt would improve classroom practice. For example, experienced reader/table leader B said, "Everyone talks about how they teach. They offer ideas. You can talk with college professors. There are many opportunities to improve your teaching skills" (Experienced reader/table leader B).

Other participants spoke of how the networking experience benefitted them on a more personal level. "I remember my first year for the reading in 2002. I still hadn't figured out how to

teach the class, but I know that when I returned home, I was more confident and it has been the same way every year" (Experienced reader/table leader D).

Although the majority of participants responded with positive comments about the value of networking experience and opportunities for discourse with other world history professionals, one participant voiced a recommendation for College Board to further improve this experience:

At the AP reading, other participants were talking about the importance of networking, but, after eight hours of grading essays, getting out at 5:15 pm and running over for dinner, I crash afterwards and I don't have the energy to talk to other people or to participate in any of the activities. So it would be nice, maybe even on only a few days, to get out earlier so that we can focus on the collaboration or the networking and the professional development. (Novice reader B)

As a related prompt to research question three, participants were also asked if their participation in the APWH Reading had affected their teaching practices in history classes other than advanced placement. Nine of eleven participants stated that the knowledge and skills gained at the APWH Reading had already affected the manner in which they taught their other history classes, and the other two respondents stated that this was a long-term personal goal. For example, experienced reader/table leader C stated, "We're getting ready to start the third year of re-writing our curriculum and we have put in many of the skills. The Habits of Mind that we teach in APWH [a list of specific historical thinking skills used by APWH] have now become part of our regular world history curriculum." A novice reader commented that, "It is one of my long-term goals to bring them closer together, to bring the rigor and the writing into the regular class" (Novice reader C).

Another experienced reader/table leader described how the idea of the transfer of skills also addressed the issue of having high expectations for all students, saying "When you bring it into your regular class, the students are capable of doing much more" (Experienced reader/table leader C). Another experienced reader/table leader echoed those beliefs, "It's only natural that the same types of skills also translate; they are all benefitting from the same content and skills" (Experienced reader/table leader B).

Discussion

The scope of this small-scale study was limited to eleven participants and data was collected over a two-day time frame. Although the findings presented here are self-reported and cannot be generalized, they offer important insights about supporting novice and experienced teachers' professional growth in teaching a college-level course in a high school setting.

Although the participants were divided into two groups based on experience in scoring essays, participant responses seemed to indicate that there was little difference in the value that they assigned to taking part in the APWH reading/scoring. First, all participants mentioned that one of the benefits of this experience was collaborating with other secondary colleagues as well as higher education faculty. The formal protocol of training readers involves a relationship between question leaders, table leaders, and readers, and includes observation, modeling, feedback, and coaching, exactly the activities Wei et al., (2009) suggested that would support a quality professional growth experience.

Collaboration with colleagues took place both as part of the established protocol of the reading experience but also outside of those confines as well, at meals and other non-organized venues. It is through these novel and sometimes serendipitous encounters with colleagues that Lieberman (2000) viewed as outgrowths of teachers collaborating on issues "of intrinsic interest

to them or that develop out of their work. These important opportunities for teachers' development exist more readily in environments that provide a level of flexibility and collaborative work not usually possible in existing organizations" (p. 595).

In fact, some participants described a transformative process similar to what Mezirow (1997) related, in that readers had discourse with other professionals during the reading, and then, as a result, took action to improve practice. As one experienced reader/table leader stated,

> Very rarely do we [teachers] have the opportunity to collaborate on assessment and so, as a result of really thinking about assessment, there's lots of conversations that happen at the reading about 'how do you teach thesis,' 'how do you teach grouping,'[another requirement for the document-based essay question] 'how do you teach *things* [emphasis] and so I've had at least twenty conversations this week with a variety of both college and high school teachers about how to do those kinds of skills better. (Experienced reader/table leader E)

Another benefit mentioned by one respondent in particular, was that the experience was intensive. Describing the experience of evaluating multiple students essays where students were asked to describe and explain one particular element of historical analysis, one novice reader stated, "I've graded over two hundred essays and [am] really seeing the styles. I can kind of gauge other teachers and how they taught things like point of view [A particularly sophisticated historical thinking skill.]. I have had some wonderful examples in my essays to illustrate point of view and to also bring that to my students. (Novice reader A).

Moreover, all of the experienced readers as well as a majority of the novice readers have voluntarily returned each year to the AP scoring sustaining this collegial network over a period of years. As one experienced reader/table leader stated,

> I think that the best thing about the reading is the network of people you make; so you
>
> share resources, books, movies, life stories, and to have that kind of a group that you see
>
> every year is really amazing, because it's a professional network of people who are all
>
> committed to a particular field.

Research by Garet et al., (2001) and Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) affirm this

professional development practice positing that "collaboration for an extended period of time"

results in stronger integration of new knowledge into actual classroom practice.

Next, participants in both focus groups voiced their perspectives on how participation in

the APWH Reading experience enabled them to improve their practice through the knowledge

they gained of instructional strategies used to explicitly teach writing skills in their world history

classes. The actions taken by readers at the APWH scoring seems to illustrate what researchers

describe as best practices in quality professional development, what Darling-Hammond and

McLaughlin (2011) describe as "collaborating with other teachers, looking closely at students

and their work, and by sharing what they see" (p. 83). For example, working with question

leaders, table leaders, and hundreds of student essays over six days, readers developed the ability

to analyze complex writing skills and to deconstruct the essential parts of historical essays:

thesis, evidence, point of view, causation, comparison, contextualization, and even patterns of

change and continuity over time. Then, according to participant responses this ability was

transferred to the APWH classroom. As one novice reader stated, "I expect to really focus on

writing and different parts of what looks like a simple question and try to get them to understand

how they have to build the essay" (Novice reader C).

Finally, teacher efficacy for both novice and experienced readers seemed to grow as a

result of the reading experience. The sustained interactions with more experienced colleagues

over a period of several days offered readers new knowledge and opportunities to restructure

and/or build upon existing knowledge. For example, one novice reader said that "It's improved

my teaching of writing, now I do that not only with my AP students, but I do it with my honors

and my regular students" (novice reader A). Even an experienced reader/table leader spoke of the

impact of the experience, saying:

> I think that my being at the reading lends credibility to my ability to work with [students]
>
> on assessment and know what I am talking about when I am reviewing with them. Being
>
> able to give examples of how students have succeeded or failed on different types of
>
> questions, year after year, allows them to see real examples of kids who are 15 or 16
>
> years old. Those are all things that give them further insight and ability to succeed.
>
> (Experienced reader/table leader B)

The results from this study suggested that participation in the process of scoring essays at

the APWH Reading was a beneficial experience for participants, providing both an increase in

content knowledge and pedagogy as well as demonstrating a quality professional growth

experience. These benefits came from not only the participation in the actual training and process

of scoring, but also from networking experiences, confirmed what Marx, Blumenfield, Krajcik,

and Soloway (2000) wrote about the significance of discourse within a "community of learners."

Although not specifically designed as a professional development opportunity, the evidence

seems to suggest that the experience of serving as an Advanced Placement reader, with both the

formal and informal collaboration, mentoring, and coaching that occurs between educators at the

reading, served as a beneficial learning experience.

A review of literature on professional development revealed that the actual practice of

professional development is changing with the addition of new forms of professional

development; however, traditional practices where teachers have little say in the matter and outside experts provide generic short-term presentations that are not content-specific, regardless of teacher needs, still prevail (Grimm et al., 2014; Wei et al., 2009). The results of this study however, suggest that choice, relevance, collaboration, and active participation are all key factors in providing quality professional growth for educators.

Implications

Based on the results of this study, participants indicated that a positive and relevant professional growth experience came from a voluntary experience not specifically intended to serve as a professional growth opportunity. One implication of this for those administrators or facilitators involved in planning professional growth experiences for educators is that quality professional growth can be found in a variety of unexpected places depending more on the teacher's perception of the relevance of the experience than on whether or not the experience was planned or unplanned. Providing both autonomy and relevance for teachers in choosing their professional experiences is significant, and professional development that is teacher-driven and voluntary, such as the attendance at the APWH Reading, where teachers are given a choice to match their professional growth needs to classroom goals and student needs, is a necessary and vital component to improving teacher practice for Advanced Placement teachers.

Networking with other teachers who share a common subject-matter interest can stimulate an exchange of ideas that leads to the refinement of teacher pedagogy and praxis. Teachers, especially those recognized as being master teachers, often seek professional development through collaboration with colleagues in non-traditional forms and settings. The associations developed with colleagues among institutions provide a valid opportunity for professional growth and, at the same time, an expanded design for a community of learners (Van

Veen et al., 2012). These opportunities for non-structured professional collaboration, together with other quality approaches, are vital for twenty-first century educators as they grapple with the complex educational issues they face on a daily basis. School leaders should acknowledge that teachers' ability to improve their professional pedagogy and praxis is often situated in just such encounters within their community of learners.

Finally, when research focuses on specific content areas, such as history education, there are few studies that examine the impact of professional growth opportunities (De la Paz, et al., 2011; van Hover 2008), especially for educators who teach Advanced Placement courses. This study contributes to a growing body of work on the impact of professional development by analyzing the impact of one type of informal professional growth experience on teacher knowledge and practice in one content area. Continued research in this area, especially with larger sample sizes and across other Advanced Placement history courses such as AP European History and AP U.S. History, should lead to a better understanding of what constitutes quality professional growth experiences for Advanced Placement teachers and, more importantly, how this translates into student learning.

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Table 1. AP Score Scale

Score	Meaning
5	Extremely well qualified
4	Well qualified
3	Qualified
2	Possibly qualified
1	No Recommendation

Appendix "A"

Stephen F. Austin State University
TEACHER FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Introductory Remarks:

Thank you for taking the time to come together for this focus group discussion with me today.

This discussion will probably take about 60 minutes to complete. As I mentioned to you before,

we're doing this focus group with teachers experienced in history education as well as the

learning needs of our nation's student population, specifically students enrolled in your school's

Advanced Placement (AP) world history classes. The information from your discussion will be

pulled together and used to inform practice and to improve the professional development and

support provided to the teachers involved in AP World History education.

The information you share today will be used for this purpose only. Your comments will

be tape recorded and transcribed. You will not be identified by name or recognizable in any way

in the report we prepare. However, although I encourage it, I cannot guarantee such

confidentiality from the other participants here. If, for any reason, you don't feel comfortable

sharing something with the whole group, please feel free to contact me outside of the group

setting and we will arrange a private interview.

Please note that we are not trying to achieve any kind of consensus within this group, but

rather, want to hear all different points of view. You are different people with different

experiences; therefore you will likely have different points of view to share. Please be respectful

of your colleagues during this discussion, avoiding side conversations and/or dominating the

discussion.

Let's go around the table and introduce ourselves, indicating any relevant information:

(1) In what kind of school do you teach-public or private?

(2) Approximately how many AP world history students do you teach a year?

(3) What degree(s) do you hold, and were they in history or social studies?

(4) How long you have taught World History?

(5) How long you have taught AP World History.

Focus Group Discussion Process:

Now, let me share with you a number of questions that I hope you'll be able to address during our time together. I'll be here primarily as a facilitator and listener. I will be facilitating the questioning and bringing us back to the central issue should the discussion begin to stray.

Focus Group Discussion Prompts:

1) Tell me a little bit about how you became involved in the teaching of AP World History.

2) Tell me the types of professional development activities you have found to be most supportive of the teaching/learning process in your AP classroom.

3) How would you describe these professional development activities in terms of:

- Quality?

- Usefulness?

- Match for your own professional development needs?

- Impact on student learning?

- Issues of equity? (NSDC)

4) What has been your greatest success in implementing changes in your classroom practice based on your AP World History professional development?

5) What has been your greatest challenge in implementing changes in your classroom practice based on AP World History professional development?

6) What kind of support have you had from your district-level staff in making these changes?

7) What kind of support have you had from your principal and other teachers in your school related to AP World History?

8) What kind of support have you had from other AP World History teachers?

9) What kind of support have you had from university instructors?

10) What kind of support have you had from College Board?

11) How would you describe the AP reading in terms of quality professional development?

12) How, if any, has participation in the AP reading affected your knowledge of the subject of world history?

13) How, if any, has participation in the AP reading affected the design of your world history curriculum? (NSDC)

14) How, if any, has participation in the AP reading affected the instructional methods you use in your world history classroom? (NSDC)

15) How, if any, has participation in the AP reading affected the assessment methods you use in your world history classroom? (NSDC)

16) How, if any, has participation in the AP reading affected student learning and achievement in your world history classroom? (NSDC)

17) How, if any, has participation in the AP reading affected non-AP world history courses that you may teach?

18) How would you like AP World History professional development to be different in order to better meet your needs?

19) Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your experience with AP World History professional development? Any concerns you have?

Appendix "B"

Informed Consent

Title of Project: Research Study on Professional Development of Teachers of APWH

Description of the Study: I understand that Dr. Linda Black is a researcher for Stephen F. Austin State University (SFASU) and is conducting this focus group research for the purpose of identifying effective professional development support for teachers of AP World History. I further understand the purpose of this study is to identify and analyze AP World History teachers' perceptions regarding the professional development opportunities provided to them in their career. As a purposefully selected member of this focus group, you will be asked to offer your perspectives and opinions related to a set of discussion questions regarding AP World History professional development, and you have the right to decline to answer any of the questions. This information will form the basis for recommendations of programmatic approaches and professional development designed to increase AP World History student success.

Risks/Benefits to the Participant: The potential risk to you as a participant is minimal. Every effort will be taken in protect your confidentiality, as described below. Should the questions become stressful for you, you will be given the opportunity to withdraw from the discussion at any time. Although there are no direct benefits to you as a participant, your involvement will help SFASU's researchers identify the professional development needs and guide recommendations for future AP World History professional development.

Confidentiality: All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. This study incorporates several procedures to protect your privacy. First, this informed consent letter outlines your rights and protections and reflects that your participation is voluntary. Second, your responses will be held in confidence and no effort will be made to link individuals with responses. Third, notes and audio-recordings from the interview will be stored in a secured area with access limited to the primary investigators.

Participant's Right to Withdraw from the Study: You have the right to refuse to participate in this study and the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You also have

the right to have your data destroyed at any point during or after the study, except in situations that violate state and/or federal law and regulations.

I have read the consent form (or it has been read to me) and I fully understand the contents of this document and voluntarily consent to participate. I understand that if I have any questions in the future about this study they will be answered by the investigator listed above. This consent ends at the conclusion of this research study.

_____   _____

Name (Printed)   **Date**

_____

Signature

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