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LESLLA aims to support adults who are learning to read and write for the first time in their lives in a new language. We promote, on a worldwide, multidisciplinary basis, the sharing of research findings, effective pedagogical practices, and information on policy.

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INQUIRY-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: AN EMPOWERMENT MODEL FOR LESLLA TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT: Over the course of four months, five LESLLA practitioners met to explore their practice through participation in a professional learning community (PLC). This article presents the narrative account of that experience through the collective voice of our PLC. We share our motivations for participating in this professional development experience, how this experience impacted our practice and our overall impressions of this type of professional learning activity.

KEYWORDS: Reflective teaching, professional development, teacher knowledge, professional learning community, teacher learning

1. INTRODUCTION

In the LESLLA context, teachers *and* learners are navigating new learning environments and exploring new ways of being and knowing. In a sense, they are all learning how to 'do LESLLA' together. LESLLA teachers are generally dedicated, passionate practitioners who are often very aware of the important role(s) they play in the lives of adult newcomers who are striving to find their sense of place in a new country. Most teachers arrive to the LESLLA classroom with previous L2 teacher preparation

(e.g., CELTA, TESOL Certificate, BA in Linguistics, MA TESOL), yet they are often discovering that much of what they deemed successful with adults who had formal schooling and L1 literacy is not necessarily effective in the LESLLA classroom. With a sense of great responsibility for these learners, many teachers actively seek support through colleagues, publications, online resources, conferences, workshops and courses.

Since the founding of LESLLA in 2005, the availability of research and resources has grown tremendously. LESLLA professionals have endeavored to fill a gap in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research (Tarone & Bigelow, 2011) by contributing studies on second language and literacy acquisition by adults with limited formal schooling and emerging literacy. Efforts to close the gap have resulted in a steadily growing research base—one must simply visit www.leslla.org and browse the proceedings of the annual symposia as a starting point.

Studies are leading to theories of oral language processing and the impact of literacy on language acquisition (Bigelow, delMas, Hansen, and Tarone, 2006; Tarone and Bigelow, 2005a; Tarone and Bigelow, 2005b). We have a better understanding of what does and doesn't work when teaching L2 adult emergent readers (Condelli, Wrigley, Yoon, 2009; Marrapodi, 2013; Wrigley & Guth, 1992; Vinogradov, 2008; Vinogradov & Bigelow, 2010). We have also investigated LESLLA teacher development and how to best support LESLLA teachers as they reconceptualize their knowledge base (Farrelly, 2013, 2014), adopt effective classroom practices, and work in community with other LESLLA teachers to theorize practice (Vinogradov, 2012, 2016).

2. TEACHER LEARNING THROUGH COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY

Teacher learning is a reflection of the process that takes place when teachers are developing their teacher cognitions, including their beliefs, attitudes, sense of self, and various types of knowledge (Johnson & Golombek, 2002). Teacher learning involves the sense-making that teachers employ when mapping their knowledge to their practice while continually reflecting on the interactions between them. Teacher learning is not a process that ends with the culmination of a teacher education program or training session but is an on-going endeavor that spans the length of a teacher's career. Johnson (2009) posits, "a sociocultural perspective on human learning transforms how we understand teacher learning, language, language teaching, and the enterprise of L2 teacher education" (p. 2).

When considering the best approaches to professional development for teachers in general and teachers of LESLLA learners in particular, it is widely accepted that they should be collaborative and teacher-directed. Johnson (2009) promotes an inquiry-based approach to professional development that gives teachers the chance to interact with both theory and practice. In fact, she promotes abandoning this dichotomy altogether to embrace the more "fluid construct of praxis" (Johnson, 2009: 98; Freire, 1970). Further supporting inquiry-based professional development, Sharky (2005) says, "Teacher knowledge is generated in inquiry and is facilitated by learning communities. Teacher learning involves teachers and others engaged in critical inquiry into their experiences, beliefs and assumptions..." (p. 135). Johnson (2009) adds that situating professional development in communities of practice is in keeping with a sociocultural perspective because peers can scaffold one another's learning.

3. EMBARKING ON OUR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING JOURNEY

As a group of LESLLA practitioners, we came together to create a professional learning community (PLC). We opted to incorporate several professional learning activities including a study circle (Vinogradov, 2013), paired inquiry using lesson study (Takemura & Shimizu, 1993), and independent reflective writing assignments (Farrell, 2013, 2015). This chapter provides a glimpse into our experiences. The larger study from which these narrative accounts are extracted, examines our reflective practices through a framework for reflection (Farrell, 2015). In this chapter, we highlight the overall impact of this professional learning experience on us as LESLLA teachers.

4 WHO ARE WE?

Raichle is a teacher educator in the Applied Linguistics Department and MA TESOL Program at St. Michael's College (SMC) in VT, USA. She began work as a LESLLA teacher in 2006 with a group of Burundi women who were resettled in Salt Lake City, Utah. During that time, she went through the once-typical trajectory of a new LESLLA teacher—fumbling and flailing while trying to understand why someone with an MA TESOL degree could be such a failure at teaching beginners. She sought support among the few colleagues in town who worked with LESLLA learners, and together they experimented with materials design and classroom strategies. At that time, the majority of the materials available for developing literacy skills were designed for young learners. Many LESLLA teachers were discovering two key resources, which are still in use today: the *Tutor Curriculum Guide for Teaching Adult ESL Preliterate Learners* by Cielito Brekke, which was updated in 2009 and *Making It Real: Teaching Pre-literate Adult Refugee Students* by Alysian Croydon (2005). These resources provide ways to teach English language and literacy skills alongside life skills, while honoring that our adult learners deserve to be taught with age appropriate, authentic, and relevant materials.

During the course of the six years that Raichle taught LESLLA learners, she also co-designed a course with her colleague, Ellen Knell entitled Teaching English to Adult Emergent Readers. They offered this course to graduate students in the MA TESOL program as well as to community-based LESLLA teachers. The course involved a community engaged learning component through which students implemented what they were learning in the course with LESLLA learners in the community. Ultimately, Raichle wrote a dissertation on a study of the challenges faced by LESLLA teachers and has since published and presented on the topic (see Farrelly, 2013, 2014). Upon arriving in Vermont, Raichle sought out the nonprofit organizations that specifically aim to meet the needs of refugee background learners acquiring English as an additional language (EAL). She also identified LESLLA teachers who were affiliated with her institution. She uncovered an unmet need in the area for teacher preparation for work in the LESLLA context. This led to the idea of developing this PLC for the purpose of investigating teachers' reflective practices and development over time. Raichle's roles in the PLC included organizer, facilitator, and participant, however as a participant, she was rarely reflecting on her practice but rather actively listening to the teachers and fostering discussion about their interpretations of their praxis.

At the time of the study, Annie was a volunteer teacher for a local nonprofit called Vermont Adult Learning (VAL). Her students were refugee-background adults with interrupted and/or limited formal education experience. Her class ranged in size from two students to ten students on any given day. Their first languages included Karen, Maay, Maay, Somali, and Kirundi. She had been teaching the class for one and half years, meeting the learners twice a week for two hours per session. The class met at a family center, which offered free childcare for students. All of Annie's students were mothers and they sometimes brought their young children to class. The students in Annie's class had very immediate needs and goals, such as getting a job, navigating the city, and helping their children with schoolwork. According to Annie, they were very motivated and had positive attitudes towards learning. Many of them had been coming to classes at the same center for many years and were making slow but steady progress. As a consistent group, they had created a cohesive, supportive learning community together. At the time of writing this article, Annie was completing her student teaching for her MA TESOL and K-12 licensure. She continues to work closely with refugee background students, but now most of them are adolescent and young learners. She hopes to start volunteering for VAL again soon.

Robyn is a volunteer English tutor for the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program (VRRP). Robyn teaches one-on-one in her student's home, twice a week for one hour. Her student is an adult emergent reader from Somalia. She has been living in Vermont for nearly two years with her seven children (two of whom have disabilities) while her husband remains in a refugee camp in Yemen. Her first language is Maay Maay, which does not have a writing system; she also understands some Somali and Arabic, and her children speak Arabic at home. They have established a friendly relationship, which promotes a comfortable learning environment. Robyn's student is comfortable asking her for help with day-to-day tasks (e.g., reading mail, listening to voicemails, and pointing out appointment dates on a calendar). Robyn's student is a motivated learner, and is particularly engaged when the English they are studying relates directly to her daily life. This student's main focus is her children, and on being successful at her job; much of her day is spent working (3pm-11pm). Her work needs have provided content for lessons; but changing work schedules has also presented its challenges to consistency.

Steph is also a volunteer English teacher for VRRP. She works with a family of three older (late 60s, early 70s) learners who are originally from Bhutan, but lived in Nepal prior to resettlement. Her students have been living in the U.S. for five years with their extended family. Since there are a couple of people in the family who speak English well, these students have not been able to acquire English easily or quickly. They have limited interactions with people beyond their family and cultural community. Steph teaches these learners in their home two times per week for one and a half hours per session. The setting of the classes is their furnished basement, which Steph notes is less than ideal given the "chaotic" environment that sometimes exists in the household.

When Steph initially discussed goals for this class with her students, they were most interested in learning the alphabet and working on letter and sound identification. They really wanted to learn how to read in English. As time passed, Steph noticed that they were studying for the US Citizenship test and so she shifted the focus of her lessons to incorporate more citizenship content. While she initially tried to integrate literacy and citizenship, she ultimately abandoned the citizenship content all together, noting that it was too challenging and students were losing interest. Her greatest challenges with this

group include striking a balance between developing literacy skills and helping them acquire oral language for basic communication. Her focus during the study group was to determine how to work toward both long and short-term goals in a way that seemed feasible.

Kim has been employed as an EAL teacher for VRRP for seven years. She has taught a number of different classes but during this study, we focused on her current class for newcomers. Her classes always represents multiple levels because it's the only evening class held in her town, so it is the go-to class for those with day jobs who live in the area. Her students' educational experiences range from 0-11 years of formal schooling, with the majority having less than 5 years. She meets them twice a week for two hours. Her students are men and women from various countries of origin, with cultural and linguistic influences from countries in which they lived in refugee camps. Her students' countries of origin include Bhutan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burma, Somalia, Iraq, Burundi, and Togo. She perceives one of their primary goals for learning to be gaining confidence as they navigate daily life. They focus on practical tasks such as filling out forms, shopping, using American money, and communicating at work. Those that do not work but are at home all day with small children meet their social needs of communicating and being with friends when they come to class.

5. MOTIVATIONS TO PARTICIPATE IN A PLC

We had a range of reasons for participating in this professional learning opportunity. We shared an interest in collaboratively exploring the current research on work in the LESLLA context. Below are several other themes that shape our motivations.

5.1 RAISE A CHILD OR LEARN ABCs--SEEKING A BALANCE OF PRIORITIES

For Robyn, a driving factor for her participation in this PLC was a sense that her lessons were being "derailed" by the need to address issues that felt pressing to her student--such as going grocery shopping, finding a bank that was within walking distance, sorting through mail, and staying in touch with family members who live elsewhere. Robyn had the impression that in comparison to these life issues, learning the alphabet carried less importance for her student. She knew that if she could find a way to create lessons that were more relevant to her student's daily life, she would be able to motivate her to learn the lesson content. She joined this group in part to find ideas to address that challenge. Annie also perceived barriers to her students' opportunities to learn in various life commitments, including challenges around childcare and fluctuating work schedules. She was hoping to identify strategies for how to work with these students and plan instruction that would also be responsive to their unique life situations.

5.2 IF I DON'T GET IT HERE, WHERE WILL I GET IT?

As is the case with many refugee organizations, the needs are many and the resources are limited. Some organizations have the capacity to offer professional development op-

portunities for their volunteer and paid teachers, however many are simply struggling to keep up with the day-to-day demands of a steady stream of clients. A driving reason behind all four teachers' interest in this PLC was simply that they weren't getting support for this work elsewhere.

Steph was approaching her final semester in the MA TESOL program at the start of our collaboration and she felt quite prepared to begin work in a K-12 setting. However, she noted that she was taught very little, if anything, about working with adult emergent readers during the program. She recognized that working with these adults was her passion, and therefore she decided to seek out ways to best support them. She "struggled for months" to find resources and information about teaching this particular population, and it wasn't until she joined the PLC that she learned about LESLLA and the tremendous effort that has gone into supporting teachers of this population.

Robyn had the sense that she was "reinventing the wheel" in designing age-appropriate lessons for her student--and she wasn't confident that she was the best "inventor." Robyn believed that her success with her student depended heavily on using age-appropriate and level-appropriate materials, but she was not finding any. She came into the PLC with a specific goal of identifying materials that she could use and adapt for her learner.

Kim joined the PLC with quite a bit of experience teaching EAL in general, and seven years experience teaching refugee background students in particular. She was eager to partake in this professional development experience because she had never been afforded such an opportunity through her work. She felt that she had become "stuck in a rut" with her teaching and hoped that engaging in collaborative inquiry through discussions of professional articles would offer new strategies and methods to try out with her learners.

Annie also brought experience to the table when she joined the PLC. However, although she had been teaching this population for over a year, she had been "working in the dark." She decided to make time for this experience because she had no other guidance on how to teach LESLLA learners. The nonprofit that she volunteered for didn't offer resources or trainings, and she didn't know anyone else who was teaching this population. Similar to Steph, Annie was approaching the completion of her MA TESOL program of study, and none of her classes addressed working with the lower level students. Annie's TESOL courses focused on lesson planning and activity design for a learner population that was experienced with 'doing school'--coming prepared, keeping regular attendance, arriving on time, and doing homework--behaviors which didn't match those of her adult learners.

Steph, Robyn, Kim and Annie all added that they were interested in meeting others who worked with refugee background adults. Steph believed this PLC would cultivate emotional support among colleagues who share an understanding of the unique challenges of teaching and learning in the LESLLA context. Robyn, being the newest to the TESOL profession and the MA TESOL program believed that receiving help from more experienced professionals would help her become a better EAL instructor.

6. TAKEAWAYS FROM THEORIZING PRACTICE

The range of 'take-aways' from our time in the PLC varied depending on pre-existing knowledge coming into this experience. The opportunity to read LESLLA specific research and glean strategies from the studies to try in our classes, allowed us to engage

in praxis--a cyclical process of taking theory to practice and practice to theory through reflection-for-action and reflection-on-action.

6.1 LEARNING THROUGH LIVING: LEARNER GENERATED TEXTS

According to Steph, one of the most critical pieces of information that she learned in this process was the importance of making the material relevant for adult learners. In the K-12 school system, there is a set curriculum that guides teachers through developmentally appropriate topics and lessons, however when working with adults in a community based setting, there is no set curriculum with a sequence of topics that targets the specific needs of a range of adult learners. She notes that in line with prioritizing relevance, a LESLLA teacher must be responsive and flexible when the unexpected arises in class, such as a request for support with a particular task (e.g., reading mail, making a phone call).

Related to ensuring learning is meaningful for learners, Kim's discovery of the Language Experience Approach (LEA) emerged as the most useful for her practice. She also praised the wealth of strategies presented in the readings for building literacy around learner-generated texts (e.g., Vinogradov, 2008, 2009). She also found the balanced literacy framework of Whole-Part-Whole (Fish, Knell, & Buchanan, 2007; Vinogradov, 2008) to be something she could incorporate into most lessons. Based on the readings, Kim is more proficient at designing lessons that introduce words orally and in context (e.g., story, dialogue) and attaching oral language to print for practice with decoding, recognizing sight words, developing phonological awareness, and then moving back to the context for additional fluency and comprehension work. Kim designed various literacy tasks around her books, including cloze exercises, sequence tasks with story strips, segmenting words to build phonological awareness, categorizing sight words alphabetically, and reading aloud. Kim provided copies of each book so they could practice reading the story outside of class. They also posted large versions of the stories around the class so they could continue working with the texts.

Robyn and her student explored LEA together with great success. The first book they made together revolved around the topic of her students' workplace. They went together and took pictures related to the various workplace tasks she was responsible for. Based on those pictures, Robyn and her student used this book to study work-related vocabulary and develop basic print literacy skills. In their second book, they developed a reader based on the topic of shopping. The book included pictures, vocabulary of items that her student often purchased, and prices so she could begin to practice learning money and the language of transactions.

Steph also used learner generated texts and the Language Experience Approach to make topics and texts relatable to her students. On one occasion, she and her students went on a 'field trip' to the local community garden. Her students have a large garden plot there and through the growing season, they cultivate a variety of foods to feed their extended family. On their field trip, they took pictures of all the fruits and vegetables from the garden and created a book about what they grow and how they harvest it at the end of the summer. This activity was particularly meaningful for the students because they are very connected to the work they do in their garden and take pride in being able to feed their family from the land.

6.2 REPETITION, TIME ON TOPIC & ROUTINE

Steph initially believed that she was effectively repeating topics and recycling information in her class. However she also felt the need to move on to new topics rather than stay with one topic for too long. The readings and our discussions allowed her to reformulate what 'too long' actually means in this context. She noted that she now has "research-based permission" to slow the class down and move at the pace that better supports her learners. Robyn also latched onto the notion of expanding on topics. She reported gains in her student's understanding and mastery of topics when they slowed the pace. She also saw the benefit of adding routines to her lessons (e.g., starting each lesson the same way, perhaps with a review of days, dates, weather, time). Incorporating routine boosted her student's confidence because she could anticipate the stages of the lesson and feel prepared during activities she had experienced before, such as flyswatter to review vocabulary and build phonological awareness.

6.3 ASSESSMENT

One of the more useful strategies that Steph tried out as a result of this PD group was a phonemic awareness assessment. One of the readings offered strategies for orally assessing learners' phonemic awareness through various tasks such as phoneme isolation, phoneme identification, and phoneme blending (see Curtis & Kruideneri, 2005). Prior to assessing her students' phonemic awareness through adapted versions of these suggested tasks, she thought they would test at similar levels. She identified stark variations in their abilities on the various tasks, which gave her a starting point for identifying individual strengths and differentiating learning accordingly. Robyn was equally inspired by the idea of using these types of tasks to help her student develop phonemic and phonological awareness. However, she realized that the tasks--specifically segmenting and blending--were too difficult for her student. It was a learning experience for her in understanding how to recognize how far she can push her student on certain types of tasks. Steph similarly discovered that several resources and materials we explored were too advanced for her learners. Assessment of LESLLA learners is still a challenging endeavor for teachers and programs. We continue to contend with knowing how to select level appropriate materials and activities.

7. ON THE VALUE OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Three of us work in isolation, teaching in learning spaces that are not part of any particular language program or institution. Kim, for example has a classroom in an old mill that houses several businesses that close before her class begins. Her class meets in a corner space in the basement of the enormous brick building. Robyn and Steph teach in their students' homes, which not only isolates the teachers from colleagues, but keeps the learners from venturing out to join a learning community of their own. Of course, there are valid reasons why these learners study at home, but nonetheless it contributed to a sense of isolation that motivated us to come together. Annie utilized a classroom in a community center and did come into contact with one other teacher

before and after her classes, however there was still rarely time for collaboration. In addition to being together for our PLC meetings, we were all eager to visit one another's classes and observe new strategies in action.

7.1 LEARNING THROUGH OBSERVATION

Robyn was able to observe Kim and Steph in their teaching environments. She found the experience useful because while she volunteers for a sizeable organization, she never has interactions with other teachers. As part of her observations, she gave Kim and Steph feedback--noting both strengths of the lessons and opportunities for growth. Steph noted that observing peers in the classroom was particularly beneficial to her because she learns best when she sees human activity unfold in reality, rather than simply reading about it. As she observed, she noted strategies she could use or adapt with her learners. Because Robyn was teaching in a one-on-one arrangement, she decided not to have anyone observe her teaching; however, she was still able to process and reflect on her practice with the rest of us. As the facilitator, Raichle found opportunities to observe Annie, Kim and Steph in action. She found that her responses to teachers' questions, concerns, and ideas were more robust once she had a better sense of who and where they were teaching.

7.2 ADVENTURES WITH LESSON STUDY

Lesson Study (Takemura & Shimizu, 1993) is another fruitful approach to professional learning that stands out for its direct application to the context of the teachers. A community of practice working with lesson study chooses a particular content area or class to focus on. Together, they collectively develop a lesson based around research, shared knowledge, the experience of those involved, and innovative practices they would like to implement. Once the lesson has been designed, a teacher elects to pilot the lesson with her class, allowing others in the group to observe in person or videotape for later reflection.

Within our PLC, two variations on lesson study were implemented. Robyn and Steph paired up to co-design a lesson based on Wh-questions. Because the proficiency levels of their respective students were slightly different, as was the class structure (one-on-one vs. small group), the lessons were differentiated slightly. However, they held each other accountable to delivering lessons based on their co-planning decisions. Implementation of the lessons was debriefed during our PLC sessions. Robyn found that simply introducing her student to a simple "What is this?" option led her student to ask that question often about many things she wanted to have a word for in English. Steph's implementation further revealed that she had to slow the pace of her instruction. Introducing all Wh-question words in one lesson was very confusing for her learners. She thought introducing the question words with pictures of people, places, things, and times would lead to high production with these words; they struggled and she adjusted her plans accordingly.

Annie and Kim embarked on a lesson study together. They both reported this activity to be one of the most insightful professional learning activities from the PD experience.

Lesson study made sense for the two of them because their classes were similar. They both had access to an actual classroom space with whiteboards and tables. They taught a slightly larger group of learners with a range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, ages, and formal schooling experiences. First they brainstormed a topic that would fit both sets of learners and allow them to integrate an LEA into the lesson. Incorporating the LEA meant that they had to be creative to find a topic that would work for both locations. Ultimately, they decided to review body parts, introduce senses and do a walk around their respective buildings to find things they can see, touch, smell, hear, and taste.

While they planned the lessons together, the execution of the lessons ultimately differed. Annie had the opportunity to observe Kim teaching first, which gave her some new ideas for her lesson. As they debriefed their implementation of the same lesson, they shared with us what they learned from watching each other teach the lesson they co-designed. In their first lessons, after a review of body parts and introduction to the five senses, they walked around their buildings and took photographs of the students smelling, touching, seeing, hearing and tasting things.

In her second lesson, Kim had the students recall their walk and generate sentences about the experience on chart paper; however, at that point she didn't have the pictures for the story. For the third lesson, she printed the pictures onto pages, which she stapled into a book—one for each student. At this point, they realized that some of the sentences from their recall activity on day two didn't match the pictures, but this resulted in an interesting negotiation activity. Each student copied the sentences from the chart paper into their books, making changes where needed.

In Annie's implementation of her second lesson, she brought a single copy of each picture on individual sheets of paper with space to write a caption. She started the lesson by having the students sequence the pictures in the order the events happened. Then, for each picture, she elicited sentences to match. Each of the students took a turn writing a sentence for each picture in the master book, which she later copied and distributed to everyone. Both Kim and Annie noted how nice it was to see everyone's different handwriting in one text. In comparing their lessons, Kim noted that she preferred Annie's approach and later implemented another LEA in the same fashion with great success.

8. OVERALL IMPACT OF THE EXPERIENCE

Our PLC met for four months and during that time, we not only explored research and theorized our practice, but we shared meals, laughter, and personal stories. We submitted a proposal for the 11th Annual LESLLA symposium, which was accepted, and thus we traveled as a group to Spain! All in all, our experience with this PLC has been overwhelmingly positive and rewarding. Below are a few final reflections on the impact of this experience on us as LESLLA practitioners.

8.1 GROWING FROM COMMUNITY

Similar to many LESLLA teachers, none of us was sufficiently prepared to work with adult emergent readers and much of what we have done thus far entailed a level

of action research—identifying a problem, coming up with pedagogical solutions, and trying it out. However, we were doing so in isolation. While some language service providers working with refugee background adults do provide professional development support to their teachers, it often does not directly apply to work with LESLLA learners. Thus, one of the most important element of the PLC for all of us was the chance to get together with other teachers who could provide us context-specific input and feedback on the strategies we were trying out, the materials we were using, and the puzzles we were trying to solve. Steph believes that professional learning communities serve to empower teachers and validate their practices, and she said this was true of her experience in this PLC.

For Robyn, the one-on-one teaching can feel very isolated, so it was useful to get outside help when planning lessons and selecting strategies. In sharing, she was able to get immediate, face-to-face feedback on her recent lessons and suggestions for how to make a classroom goal (e.g., identifying onset letter-sounds) align with a student goal (e.g., learning to drive). Robyn identified the theme of keeping learning relevant as a guiding principle for this work. As she made continuous efforts to let this principle inform her practice, she found her identity as a teacher shifting to include many additional roles, including case manager, driving instructor, sous chef and friend.

As Robyn participated as an observer in our classrooms, she gained a sense of ease with entering students' homes and learning spaces. Professionally, she says those experiences gave her newfound confidence and prepared her for a job she just accepted, which requires her to meet new American families in their homes, conduct needs assessments, and connect them with community-based supports. She views this PD experience as a stepping-stone for her at a critical point in her career path.

8.2 THE CHALLENGE OF TIME

In order to partake in a PLC, participants have to want to commit, show up and support one another. Everyone realized up front that the time required of us for this PD experience would be significant, on top of all other commitments. However, even though we had to make time to attend, do our readings, engage in reflective writing, prepare lessons incorporating new strategies, and observe one another—we all agree that it was worth it.

Professional development opportunities are readily available for many teachers in the K-12 setting in our state, however teachers working with LESLLA students rarely receive the support they need to pursue LESLLA specific professional learning opportunities. Both Kim and Steph noted that once a teacher has been through a study circle, she is equipped with the skills to launch her own study circle. Though extra time for opportunities like this are not always on our side, we attest that the value of the experience was such that we hope to find time to start or join another PD group as we continue along our paths as TESOL professionals. Steph commented that it is simply something you have to identify as useful for you, and then create the opportunity for yourself. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) note, the ultimate goal of participation in a professional learning community is not to produce findings, but to "ultimately alter practice and social relationships in order to bring about fundamental change in classrooms, schools, districts, programs, and professional organizations" (p. 135).

9. CONCLUSION

There is ample evidence to support the efficacy of participation in professional learning communities, communities of practice, and collaborative inquiry for professional development. This opportunity has allowed us to reflect on our practice, engage meaningfully with research relevant to our context, and develop relationships with peers who are now our professional colleagues and friends.

Two points emerge as evident from this experience. First, L2 teacher education programs must be responsive to the changing learner profiles in our schools and communities. Teachers should be prepared to work with L2 adult learners with limited formal schooling and emerging literacy skills. We should continue to demand high standards for professionalization in the LESLLA teaching context and stand as advocates for the learners (Vinogradov, 2013). We assert that TESOL teacher education programs should include modules, if not entire courses devoted to preparing teachers to work with LESLLA learners through a focus on developing the five core domains of the LESLLA teacher knowledge base (Vinogradov, 2013). Faculty in MA TESOL programs could also seek to develop partnerships with local language service providers and cultivate professional development opportunities with community-based teachers. Secondly, LESLLA should continue its path toward becoming a professional organization to maintain the rate at which we can collectively continue to contribute to our growing understanding of this work through research, collaborations, curriculum and materials design, and conferences.

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