

Investigating the Effectiveness of Selected Music Teacher Professional Development Experiences

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Abstract

This study is the first in a series to examine the effectiveness of selected music teacher professional development experiences. A questionnaire was distributed to music teachers who attended summer workshops of varied lengths and nature in Connecticut and Florida. Participants were asked to identify factors that impact their ability to implement changes in their teaching. Respondents in Connecticut indicated that having evidence of improved student learning and recognizing a need for improvement are the most influential factors of motivation for changing their teaching. They identified the opportunity to apply new information and receive feedback as the most valuable parts of a professional development experience. Adequate preparation time and availability of appropriate teaching materials were identified as an important factors in being able to implement desired changes. When asked how they could be best supported in their efforts to implement changes in their practice, teachers communicated a variety of strategies for maintaining communication with participants and instructors. Results from questionnaires distributed in Florida and follow-up communications with participants will be presented during this session along with implications for designing effective professional development. Future investigations will examine participant implementation of changes in practice as self reported and observed by investigators.

Introduction

Professional development (PD) experiences designed for music teachers are often short-term sessions (1-8 hours) and summer workshops (3- 5 days). National organizations devoted to PD, such as assert that PD is more effective when certain key elements are in place.

- Part of an overall, comprehensive plan for change
- Administrative support (financial and time)
- Standards-based
- Research-based
- Clear outcomes; focus
- Reflect teacher and student needs
- Relevant to subject matter
- Continuous (not stand-alone, one-shot)
- Results driven (teacher and student performance)
- Varied assessments
- Collegial context and interdependency
- Teacher input, choice and leadership
- in which we Varied approaches

Broad Questions

1. Are common music teacher PD experiences such as stand-alone district in-service session, short-term workshops, conference sessions, and university sponsored one-week workshops changing teacher practice and student learning?
2. How can commonly offered music teacher PD experiences be transformed to become more effective?
3. What is the role of non-district music teacher PD provider (state music association, university faculty) in designing effective PD experiences?

1. Specific Questions that Guided This Study

In regard to investigating effectiveness of three PD experiences for music teachers:

2. What can be learned by examining the perceptions of workshop participants toward changing their practice?
2. What are the self-reported and observable benefits when workshop participants develop an action plan for applying workshop content into their job context?
 3. What can be learned by investigating the follow-up actions of workshop participants?
 4. Are there differences in responses of participants who attend short-term and one-week music teacher workshops?

PD Experiences a personal musicianship development Investigated

1. Three day summer solfege workshop for elementary and choral music teachers (district sponsored); 24 participants

- Teacher input gathered at beginning in attempt to enhance relevance
- Development of Action Plan (application of content and follow-up) at conclusion to promote focus and accountability

2. One week summer choral symposium (university sponsored); 12 participants

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- Choral music educators only
- Opportunities to develop sense of community
- Teacher input gathered at beginning in attempt to enhance relevance
- Opportunities for application, varied assessment and feedback
- Development of Action Plan (application of content and follow-up) at conclusion to promote focus and accountability
- Attempt to extend the experience (encouraged interaction, instructor follow-up)
- Opportunities for interaction/collaboration with leaders and other participants during and after PD experience
- Participants selected focus areas from course content that were used to develop individual action plans

3. Two hour mentor training session (district sponsored); 21 participants

- Elementary, choral and instrumental participants
 - Opportunities for and encouragement of interaction/collaboration with leaders and other participants during and after PD experience
 - Development of Action Plan (application of content and follow-up) at conclusion to promote focus and accountability
 - Accountability plan (periodic reporting of activities, evaluation, questions)

Three-day Solfege Workshop and Weeklong Choral Symposium Participant

Questionnaire (distributed on last day of workshop)

1. What were the most meaningful/helpful parts of the workshop?
2. How could we make the workshop more meaningful/helpful to you?
3. What do you plan to change in your teaching as a result of this workshop (Conducting, Score Analysis, Rehearsal Techniques, Solfege Applications, Other)?
4. What could we do to best support you in implementing the change(s) you identified in Question 3?
5. Rate each of the following in regard to their importance in helping you implement what you want to change in your teaching:

	Not important	Somewhat important	Very important
a. Having prepared teaching materials when school starts			
b. Having a colleague to contact during the year when needed			
c. Gathering with other trained colleagues on a regular basis to problem solve and/or develop teaching materials			
d. Additional workshops (training and support on the topic) during the year			
	Not important	Somewhat important	Very important

Additional evaluation of PD experiences by week-long workshop participants

1. What types of activities/experiences motivate you to change your teaching?
 - Enthusiasm of presenter?
 - Ability of presenter to demonstrate impact of information toward improving student learning?
 - Recognition for need to change/improve something in my teaching?
 - Other?
2. What factors are most likely to help you change your teaching?
 - Explicit handouts?
 - Opportunity to practice and/or apply information with feedback?
 - Opportunity to discuss content with other participants?
 - Opportunity to ask questions/get support from presenter after returning to your classroom?
3. What factors impede you from applying skills/materials from a PD course?
4. Rank order the following types of PD experiences in their order of effectiveness for you.

- In-service within building or district
- Weeklong summer workshops
- Workshops with several meetings throughout the semester
- Instructional video

Mentor Training Questionnaire (completed at conclusion of workshop)

1. Describe how you intend to initiate contact with your mentee(s) this year.
2. Identify professional growth areas you would consider pursuing collaboratively with your mentee(s).
3. What do you anticipate to be the greatest challenges you will face in being a mentor?
4. Describe how you would like to be supported during the year to maintain mentor effectiveness.

Follow-up Email for with All Workshop Participants

Participants from all three workshops were contacted in the beginning of September via email and asked to respond to the following questions:

1. Outline whatever you have done in regard to planning or action that incorporates your identified intentions or some of your new learning from the workshop you attended.
2. Share any successes, frustrations, or questions associated with implementing you plans.

Results

Course Evaluation and Action Plans

Solfege Workshop and One-week Choral Symposium:

Summary of Responses to questions 4 and 5 evaluation form- final day of , including # identified as “very important”

4. What could we do to best support you in implementing identified goals?	
Three-day Solfege Workshop	One-week Choral Symposium
<input type="checkbox"/> Materials/handouts/resources (2)	Observe us implementing new strategies (2)
Connect with leaders through email; follow up (6)	Periodic follow up (email, blog, available to answer questions, winter-session) (8)
<input type="checkbox"/> More workshops (11)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Availability to connect with participants; share ideas (4)	

5 Rate importance of each in helping you change your teaching	
3-Day Solfege Workshop	One-week choral Symposium
Having prepared teaching materials when school starts (20)	Having prepared teaching materials when school starts (11)
Having a colleague to contact during the year when needed (20)	Having a colleague to contact during the year when needed (8)
Gathering with other colleagues on a regular basis to problem solve and/or develop teaching materials (19)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gathering with other colleagues on a regular basis to problem solve and/or develop teaching materials (6)
Additional training and support on topic during the year (25)	Additional training and support on topic during the year (7)

Summary of responses to questions regarding perceptions toward PD administered to Choral Symposium participants:

- Factors that motivate participants to change their teaching
 - Having evidence of improved student learning and recognizing a need for improvement are the most influential factors of motivation for changing their teaching (6)
- Perceived value by participants on most helpful strategies used during PD experience (summary of highest rankings)
 - Opportunity to apply information and receive feedback (11)
 - Explicit handouts, interaction with participants and availability of instructor beyond the workshop – all received mixed rankings
- Factors that are most likely to impede implementation of changes in teaching
 - Adequate preparation time and availability of appropriate teaching materials were identified as an important factors in being able to implement desired changes.
- Perceived value by participants on various types of PD experiences
 - Week-long summer workshops identified valuable (11 ranked as most valuable)
 - In-service within building or district identified (7 ranked as least valuable) and instructional videos (5 ranked as least valuable)

Additionally, responses from follow-up from participants of all three workshops via email questionnaires were examined. Participants identified various changes in planning or teaching as a result of new learning in workshop. Additionally, participants expressed feelings of success and frustration in implementing changes to their teaching.

Conclusions

- The short-term PD experiences (one-day and three-day workshops) and one-week workshop examined in this investigation contributed to change in practice as reported by respondents.

2. Participants in the one-week workshop valued the opportunity to apply workshop knowledge and get feedback from instructor.
3. Participants perceived one-week workshops and follow-up workshops as being extremely valuable
4. Preferences expressed by participants (e.g., desire for instructor feedback, opportunities to contact colleagues) do not always result in follow-through.

Future Investigations

1. Pre-test/Post-test model with collection of baseline data is needed to have more valid data to analyze impact of PD experiences on change in teacher practice and student learning.
2. Explore the effect on the follow-up participation rate if graduate credit or Continuing Education Units (CEU) were offered.
3. Partnership of university instructors with districts may provide more opportunities for teacher support and follow-up with supervisors/administrators