

Research Brief

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Final Summary

PreK-2 Literacy Coherence Research Study in Cohort 3 of SFUSD

By Preetha K. Menon & Janet Carlson
Center to Support Excellence in Teaching (CSET)
Stanford University

Background

The Haas Jr. grant allocated funding for Cohort 3 of the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD), which consists of 11 elementary schools. SFUSD organizes its administrative structure into cohorts, with each cohort dedicated to addressing the specific needs of elementary, middle, and high schools within the district. Specifically, there are five cohorts for elementary schools, one cohort for middle schools, and one cohort for high schools in SFUSD. The grant funds were utilized to support the coherence of literacy instruction from Pre-K to 3rd grade in Cohort 3.

This study aimed to examine the professional learning collaborative (PLC) funded by this grant at two school sites within Cohort 3 - Bret Hart and Charles Drew elementary schools. A PLC is a cooperative and interactive approach to professional development and learning in which educators who share common goals, interests, or challenges and work collaboratively to enhance their knowledge, skills, and practices and come together to learn and grow collectively. The ultimate aim is to improve professional practice, enhance student outcomes, and foster a culture of continuous learning within the participating community. The goal of this study was to understand the opportunities and challenges associated with implementing the PLC for the coherence of literacy instruction from Pre-K to 3rd grade in Cohort 3, and how to foster the scalability of the lessons learned.

Methods

From January 2023 to April 2023, data was collected in the form of interviews, interim reports, meeting notes, lesson plans, professional learning session materials, and observations of two online PL sessions. The participants of this study included the members of the leadership and instructional teams of Cohort 3. The leadership team consisted of 2 early education department members, 4 general administration and 2 principals responsible for implementing the PLC, while the instructional team included 2 facilitators of the PL sessions, 5 instructional coaches, and 6 teachers. The analysis aimed to gain insights into professional learning efforts, instructional capacity building of teachers and supports for scalability of literacy instruction district-wide within Cohort 3.

Overview of the Collaborative

The collaborative was implemented over five years, and Table 1 highlights the number of participants each year, along with the number of facilitators and instructional coaches who served as co-facilitators. The PLCs were implemented in the two school sites with integrated Pre-K, TK, and K-5 grades. These sites primarily serve Title I students and families with a predominantly Black, Latino, and Pacific Islander student population.

Table 1. Professional Learning Collaborative Participants

| Year | Number of teacher participants in the PLC | Number of facilitators |
|----------------|---|---|
| #1 (2018-2019) | 5 | 1 |
| #2 (2019-2020) | 9 | 2 |
| #3 (2020-2021) | 12 | 2 |
| #4 (2021-2022) | 6 | 2 + 3 or 4 instructional coaches as co-facilitators |
| #5 (2022-2023) | 6 | 1 + 4 or 5 instructional coaches as co-facilitators |

Implementation of PLC

The PLC involved monthly professional learning sessions (PL sessions), classroom observations by instructional coaches, and regular feedback sessions with instructional coaches and other leadership team leaders. The PL sessions were conducted on a monthly basis and focused on specific themes. Topics covered in these sessions included colonialism. A particular emphasis was on the integration of social justice standards, with speaking and listening skills. In addition to the PL sessions, teachers also had opportunities for further learning. This included engaging in book studies and participating in discussions about the use of lesson templates that showcased the integration of literacy and social justice standards.

Among the valuable resources used by many teachers in these sessions were materials introduced by Debra Sullivan who facilitated a couple of book studies, using her works like "[Cultivating the Genius of Black Children](#)." Additionally, teachers benefited from [Rebellious read-alouds by Vera Ahijya](#), considering them as highly regarded resources for their professional development.

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Fig 1. Representation of the tenets for institutionalization

For our analysis, we adopted the lens of institutionalization - the process by which various social structures are integrated into everyday life, such as rules, norms, practices, and routines - to summarize our findings from this study. This lens served as a basis for identifying the challenges and making key recommendations to help ensure the success of future collaboratives. The three tenets (See Fig.1) which guided our study include:

1. Establishing a structure and environment conducive to learning
2. Institutionalizing team roles and responsibilities
3. Establishing organizational routines and norms

Challenges identified during the Collaborative

During the first three years, the Cohort 3 team faced challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Priorities shifted towards supporting student well-being, and emotional well-being and safe spaces became primary concerns in the subsequent planning of the PL sessions. These disruptions hindered the establishment of a roadmap for continuing and maintaining the collaborative's efforts, thus impacting the coherence of literacy instruction from PreK-3 grades.

In addition, the lack of full participation from educators in grades K-3, particularly in the last two years was problematic. It led to the lack of exposure to the integration of literacy and social justice standards, as evidenced in the PL sessions. Further, as these two sites are magnets for several grant collaboratives, prioritizing teacher participation in different collaboratives was challenging. All these factors contributed to the varying notions of coherence in literacy instruction and what it means in practice in Pre-K to 3rd grades.

Key Findings

1. Positive and Sustainable Structures and Environment

- a. Funds were utilized to obtain resources for the PL sessions and compensate the participants. Some of the funds were also used to create similar learning environments across the Pre-K classes to have students experience similar settings from Pre-K to K, like classroom furniture, books that focus on literacy and cultural relevance, and manipulatives that focus on literacy instruction. Remote attendance options, early release time, and after-school sessions facilitated Pre-K teachers' participation. The safe spaces in the PL sessions created by the main facilitator and instructional coaches served as additional attractions for the teachers. Another important application of these funds was designing and implementing bilingual classrooms at one of the sites at the Pre-K and K levels

2. Effective and Collaborative Team roles and responsibilities

- a. Cohort 3 hired designated facilitators to design and implement the PL sessions using these funds. Some of the team roles that supported instruction were the one-on-one coaching available for all the teachers. One of the leadership team members responsible for different collaboratives at their school site placed teachers in different PL collaboratives strategically such that in the first two years, the elementary teachers attended the sessions of this PLC. In the subsequent years, Pre-K and K teachers participated in the sessions, thus allowing the Pre-K teachers to access equity-based PL opportunities and attend to the notion of coherence of instruction from Pre-K to K grades. By participating in the PL and engaging in the feedback sessions, the Pre-K teachers understood their crucial role in improving literacy instruction for their students. These opportunities served to enhance the professionalization of their roles as early educators.

3. Productive and Tailored Organizational Routines and Norms

- a. One of the routines that served the instructional team was the feedback systems in place. First was the two-pronged feedback approach, where teachers received formal feedback from a dedicated instructional coach who observed their instruction in the classroom and informal versions from other coaches who attended the PL sessions. Next, the instructional team also found that active classroom walks and observation protocols supported the feedback systems. Finally, other routines where the instructional team felt supported were the meetings between the facilitators and leaders. Further, some of the artifacts created during the PL sessions, such as the Google website containing instructional resources and lesson plan templates on integrating literacy and social justice standards, were very helpful to the participating teachers.

4. Other Leverages to support Literacy Coherence as suggested by Participants

| Leadership Team | Instructional Team |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Include students' families and communities in literacy instruction by distributing literacy kits adapting the structures used during Covid.● Use existing coaching teams for extended professional learning.● Align efforts of a couple of grants with similar goals. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Extend the PL sessions for paraprofessionals at these two sites.● Offer equity-based resources and artifacts used in PL sessions to other sites in Cohort 3. |

Recommendations on addressing challenges and using the leverages:

The following recommendations are comprehensive and provide ways to maintain coherence and alignment for literacy instruction across Pre-K-3rd grades.

1. Building and strengthening the roadmap for coherence and continuity of professional learning efforts across Pre-K- 3rd grades
 1. Include more educators in the initial planning & design of collaboratives and continue to assign dedicated one-on-one coaches and PL facilitators.
 2. Identify grants with similar goals and plan professional learning efforts to meet similar goals and continue efforts for supporting bilingual instruction (with a large percentage of ELs).
 3. Create small coaching teams which include instructional coaches and teachers (paraprofessionals at pre-K) across grades within these sites.
 4. Continue the integration between social justice standards and literacy standards in lessons.
2. Fostering enhanced participation from teachers of all grades
 1. Place groups of teachers strategically in different collaboratives based on the goals of the grants.
 2. Provide spaces and time to leverage small instructional/coaching teams and paraprofessionals to enhance participation and diffusion of learning across grades without relying exclusively on attending professional learning sessions.
3. Promoting and clarifying varying notions of coherence of literacy instruction
 1. Support the integration between social justice standards and literacy standards across Pre-K- 3rd grades within this site and across sites as showcased in these PL sessions.
 2. Provide access for students' families to be involved in instruction by extending literacy activities at students' homes by adapting the structures used to distribute kits during Covid.
 3. Support efforts to have bilingual classrooms for English learners.

Note:

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