

# Professional Development within Collaborative Teacher Study Groups: Pitfalls and Promises

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Teacher study groups are often thought to be effective professional development structures. Such teacher communities may foster teacher learning through a collaborative culture and the codification of group members' collective knowledge. However, not all study groups are effective professional development. This article is a discussion of factors that may contribute to the success or failure of collaborative teacher study. Recommendations for practice are provided, with a focus on music teacher study groups.

**Keywords:** collaboration, music education, professional development, teacher community

Various stakeholders in teacher professional development have recommended teacher collaboration as a way to support meaningful teacher learning. In January 2010, Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, delivered a speech at the National Press Club entitled "A New Path Forward: Four Approaches to Quality Teaching and Better Schools." In this speech, Weingarten called for more collaboration:

Imagine a system in which teachers have time to come together to resolve student issues, share lesson plans, analyze student work, discuss successes and failures, and learn through high-quality professional development. Imagine a system in which students can't fall through the cracks—because they're backed by a team of teachers, not just the one at the front of the room. (Weingarten 2010)

In practice, teachers spend much of their time alone at the front of a room, rarely joining others in sustained, reflective inquiry into teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond et al. 2009). For music teachers, who usually work on specialized, isolated teaching assignments, such collaboration is especially rare (Haack 2003). However, collaborative teacher study groups (CTSGs), which are structures intended to "tap local expertise and the collective wisdom that thoughtful teachers can generate by working together" (Feiman-Nemser 2001, 1,042) may offer a place where reflective shared inquiry can occur.

Weingarten's image of teachers working together to improve teaching practice is powerful, and the idea of teachers thoughtfully generating "collective wisdom" is appealing to those teachers who desire communication and valuable input from colleagues as they develop their teaching craft. However, the formation of teacher communities is not a professional development panacea. In fact, Little notes, "claims about the generative power of professional community for individual development and for whole-school reform frequently founder on evidence that not much has changed at the level of teaching and learning in the classroom" (2003, 940). Nonetheless, the idea of teachers learning and growing together in small, focused groups is attractive to many teachers who have traditionally had little power in shaping the professional development models in which they participate. The structure of small learning communities stands in sharp relief to the one-size-fits-all workshop and clinic model that is so pervasive in professional development practice, but it is important to ask when and how these communities are most effective. In this article, I examine existing literature on professional development within teacher communities to analyze the factors that contribute to their success or failure and distill recommendations to focus in particular on the needs of music teachers. To begin, I define the CTSG in greater depth and place the characteristics of groups of teacher learners in a historical context.

## COLLABORATIVE TEACHER STUDY GROUPS

*Site-based teacher study groups, inquiry groups, and communities of practice* are common labels attached to groups

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of teacher-learners. These groups are sometimes independent entities that are organized and run by teachers for the purpose of sustaining their own learning. In other situations, administrators, university professors, and various outside persons may instigate and facilitate these groups. With or without external leadership, the most successful study groups contain collaborative elements: goals are shared and groups are organized around the aim of codifying and improving the local knowledge that is most important to their particular members. In this article, I use the term *CTSG* to denote a group of teachers collaborating in a shared, systematic investigation of teaching practice in a situation that can be with or without outside leadership or facilitation.

Craig has investigated the difference between “teachers’ tacitly understood knowledge communities (KCs)—that is, the people with whom they freely make sense of their experiences” and “professional learning communities (PLCs)” (2009, 599). In KCs, which may be found in any setting—inside or outside the schools—collaboration may emerge organically and the focus is directed to accounts of practice. In administratively introduced PLCs, collaboration is expected and the focus is directed toward teachers’ mastery of certain teaching techniques or ways of looking at student learning.

Craig’s distinction between KCs and PLCs raises a broader question about the aims of professional development: is teacher professional development a way to move teachers toward uniformity in instructional efforts (the “best practices” training model) or is it a way to acknowledge teachers as authorities in their own right who drive their professional development on an individual basis through the process of engaging in a cyclical pattern: “Knowledge is derived from practice and practice is informed by knowledge” (West 2011, 91)? The aim of this article is not to determine if teacher professional development should strive for either the elusive goal of sameness and consistency in effective practice or the equally difficult objective of assisting individual teachers in their own personal movement along a continuum of professional growth. Rather, my goal here is to deconstruct the elements of collaborative communities that are intended to affect teacher learning at either end of the spectrum. Examples of teacher communities that are provided here include tightly controlled PLCs focused on moving teachers toward the use of particular content, as well as KCs allowing more open and fluid examinations of teaching practice. This article focuses on how elemental structures of any purposed community may support or thwart teacher learning.

#### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN COMMUNITIES: A CULTURE CHANGE

A CTSG offers an alternative to the common professional development workshop model. Its unscripted nature stands

in relief to the typical one-way delivery of tips, techniques, or ideas that may or may not have any effect on teaching practice or student achievement. In 2009, researchers conducting a meta-analysis of large-scale teacher professional development surveys, research studies, and evaluation reports found clear research support for significant shortcomings inherent in “the occasional, one-shot workshops that many school systems tend to provide, which generations of teachers have derided” (Darling-Hammond et al. 2009, 9).

Supporting groups of teachers in identifying and sharing their collective professional wisdom of good practice is not a new idea. The 1973–78 study on “Federal Programs Supporting Educational Change” (McLaughlin 1990) provided a seminal look at the efficacy of efforts to generate change in educational practices. This study found that the most effective strategies were concrete, teacher-specific, extended training; local classroom assistance; teacher decision-making; and regular teacher meetings for the purpose of observing other classrooms to foster long-term, collaborative learning.

Joyce and Showers (1980) were among the first researchers to describe the potential for collaborative learning between teachers. In an article about improving in-service training, they suggested that “teachers might begin to observe one another informally[,] . . . engage in discussions about teaching behavior and then proceed toward focused attempts at change” (1980, 384). An analysis of several large-scale studies conducted by Darling-Hammond et al. confirms that “professional community-building can deepen teachers’ knowledge, build their skills, and improve instruction” (2009, 11). The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) further expands on this argument by claiming that “the most powerful forms of staff development occur in ongoing teams that meet on a regular basis . . . [These] learning communities or communities of practice operate with a commitment to the norms of continuous improvement and experimentation and engage their members in improving their daily work to advance the achievement of school district and school goals for student learning” (National Staff Development Council [NSDC] 2001).

Despite the compelling case that can be made for the inclusion of CTSGs within teacher professional development models, implementation of this approach has not been widespread. In 2009, a survey conducted by the Center for Teacher Quality/Teacher Network identified a “hunger for collaborative opportunities . . . [for] ‘professional community’ of other teachers with whom to exchange ideas and best practices for their classrooms” (Berry, Daughtrey, and Weider 2009, 2). In an analysis of the 2003–04 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), which includes a dataset of 130,000 teachers, Darling Hammond et al. found that only 17 percent of teachers characterized their collaborations with other teachers as involving “a great deal of cooperative effort,” and only 14 percent agreed that they had *thoughtfully* collaborated on curriculum content (2009, 23).

In 2009, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan was asked in an interview why, after years of evidence have described effective professional development that diverges from traditional models, the workshop-style delivery remains so prominent. Duncan's reply was insightful: "I think that's the easy way out, and people tend to do what they've always done . . . [Any shift] is going to require a change in culture" (Mervis 2009).

The necessary culture change may be best driven from the ground up. Teachers overwhelmingly value professional development that provides a coherent connection between their experiences and their actual classroom practice, engagement in content-area learning, and communication with other teachers (Garet et al. 2001). For a culture change to occur, however, CTSGs must clearly be worthwhile and well structured. Teachers have little patience with professional development that fails to deliver promised dividends to participants (Stanley 2009).

### THE PITFALLS: DIFFICULTIES IN COLLABORATIVE TEACHER STUDY GROUPS

Despite their persuasive appeal to teachers who are starved for meaningful collaborative learning, some researchers have found CTSGs to be unsuccessful when used purposely as a model for professional development (Rousseau 2004; Yamagata-Lynch 2001). I outline some of these challenges in the following sections.

#### Community Does Not Equal Growth

A CTSG is not a foolproof model. A group of teachers can work together to either reinvent and improve teaching practice or simply reinforce the status quo. One concern about forming a tightly knit professional community is the potential to replace "the isolated classroom teacher with the isolated teacher group and balkanized workplace" (Little 2003, 939). A community of teachers may form and learn together about teaching but be unable to make meaningful and lasting changes that positively alter the fabric of the school because of administrative, scheduling, or peer pressure obstacles.

Some community values seem inherently positive: the sharing of knowledge, the creation of a set of common beliefs, and the incorporation of novices into a professional community. On the other hand, community members may foster an environment that is intolerant of conflict, explicitly or subtly control who is allowed to join, or demand obedience to norms established by only a few members. A community can support uniformity or mediocrity as much as creativity or innovation. Finally, communities have vastly different ways of handling communication that may be positive or negative.

#### Disagreement

CTSGs can vary widely in the type and content of teacher talk that they foster. In theory, CTSGs are places for edu-

cators to entertain disagreement and reconsider and clarify beliefs. However, norms of polite interaction and the desire for consensus often result in groups that quickly concur rather than strive to answer hard questions honestly. The NSDC has acknowledged that CTSGs are not automatically successful and accordingly has created a standard for staff development to "provide educators with the knowledge and skills to collaborate[,] . . . constructively managing the conflict that inevitably arises when participants discuss their fundamental beliefs" (NSDC 2001). Managing such conflict and anticipating and planning interactions within the community are vital considerations for members of study groups. A related challenge is to balance the group members' diverse characteristics, which can be affected by factors as varied as teachers' self-identification as general music teachers versus ensemble conductors or their affiliations with different methodologies and views of the aims of music education.

#### The Challenges of Music Teacher Communities

Music educators' jobs, when compared with the jobs of their colleagues in other subjects, are faced with unusual "logistical and locational differences and difficulties" (Haack 2003, 10), including such challenges as working with multiple staffs and large numbers of students at many grade levels. Both novice and experienced music teachers frequently report isolation and a lack of access to targeted subject-specific development in music as obstacles they face (Conway 2003; Scheib 2006).

CTSGs are ideally suited to meet the needs of arts teachers by serving as a remedy for the unique isolation these teachers endure as well as meeting their need for subject-specific professional development. However, simply creating a music teacher community does not ensure that it will provide meaningful professional development. Many music teachers have a unique position within their school buildings that contrasts with the situation of single-grade-level teachers who often have colleagues with similar teaching assignments just down the hall. Conflicts regarding methodologies and desired student outcomes are common in groups of music teachers who have frequently learned to thrive on the autonomy bred by isolation. Extremely high student-teacher ratios and multi-school, multi-grade-level assignments coupled with afterschool and evening responsibilities and the high public profile of performance ensembles can make the practice of teaching music both frantic and disconnected, and may allow only rare interactions with colleagues. Teachers have reported that districtwide music department meetings can feel overcompetitive or irrelevant to individuals striving to do their best in unique, remotely related situations. Curricular alignment is an elusive aim. Structuring a rewarding, purposeful CTSG for music teachers requires consideration of all of these elements, as well as an examination of what we already know about successful groups in other curricular areas.

## RESEARCH ON COLLABORATIVE TEACHER STUDY GROUPS

It is important to examine the hallmarks of groups that have been successful in supporting teacher learning and to identify the elements that have contributed to the failure-to-thrive, or lack of teacher learning, in some groups. Existing research on teacher learning communities points to six important considerations: (a) the length and quality of participants' commitment to the group; (b) the tension between the goals of improving content-area knowledge and pedagogical skills; (c) the way that teachers with varied goals for development participate and assume different roles within the group; (d) the group's mechanisms for honest examination of teaching practices and its structures for conversation; (e) the teaching assignments represented within the group membership; and (f) support for classroom implementation of new ideas and skills. The following sections examine each of these considerations in turn. I include recommendations for music education practice within each.

### Length and Quality of Commitment

There is some evidence that long-term CTSGs are better able to move beyond "pseudocommunity" (Grossman, Wineburg, and Woolworth 2000)—that is, friendly consensus at the expense of real growth. Teachers who are not used to sharing and learning from one another may find boundaries uncertain and norms unfamiliar as they begin to work together. Some time must be invested to allow the group to move past the politely formal stage, in which participants hesitate to disagree, and the next stage, in which conflict and disagreement emerge and participants may retreat from commitment to the group. If difficulties can be surmounted and teachers can learn ways to disagree productively, the stage that follows will allow a renewal of participants' feelings of success and efficiency.

No clear evidence exists regarding the typical length of time necessary for a CTSG to effectively move through these stages. Groups could be structured to manage these stages by explicitly acknowledging the difficulty of maintaining goodwill in the face of substantial debate and the challenge of moving through disagreement to seek understanding of another's viewpoint. Bringing this reality to the forefront of the group's interaction from the beginning by openly speaking about it, staging roleplaying scenarios, or writing about past experiences with arguments prepares members for the idea that debate and disagreement can be productive phases of a group's life together and not its defining element. Veiled conflict can be brought to the surface in gentle ways, enabling members to toggle between the positive feelings of connection, support, and learning, and productive dialogue.

Very longterm commitments may not be necessary if the group can sustain organized cycles of action over a period of time; a key cycle might follow the stages of asking ques-

tions, gathering data or information to answer the questions, and returning to evaluate evidence and reflect (Craig 2009; Grossman, Wineburg, and Woolworth 2000; Junda 1994; Robbins 1995). Teachers may benefit from an intense commitment to an eight-week cycle or might be better suited to a yearlong endeavor; the primary goal is for group members to be aware of and committed to each stage of group behavior, especially the effort that is sometimes needed to push into the next step of the cycle.

In this issue, West notes that such cyclical teacher collaboration is rare but has much in common with the knowledge-seeking efforts of other professions. Music teachers who receive the opportunity to come together in CTSGs for these sorts of systemized, cyclical efforts can provide local cohesion for an otherwise little-codified professional knowledge base of music education. Music teachers who are not asked to examine music teaching and learning in a systemic way or encounter challenges from colleagues often naturally retreat into a state of comfort with "what works for me in my classroom." Music teachers within a district or county should be pushed to come together to engage in this cyclical process, and emphasis should be placed on data gathering to answer real music teaching and learning dilemmas. A semester-long shared effort to investigate one aspect of music teaching—for example, composition for middle school students—would allow enough time for eight to ten meetings and could transform a pseudo-community into a more trusting, substantive learning group that relies on data to anchor its debates.

### Content-Area versus Pedagogical Knowledge

Professional development providers are often faced with a choice: should the goal of development efforts be to improve content-area knowledge, to promote shifts in pedagogy, or both? CTSG instigators face the same quandary. Researchers have investigated how teacher learning communities may address the goals of both strengthening subject-area skills and broadening pedagogical content knowledge.

In a 2000 study, Grossman, Wineburg, and Woolworth established a twofold professional development goal for a community of high school English and history teachers: foster subject-area learning through book club discussions and develop pedagogical learning through the creation of an interdisciplinary curriculum. Although tensions arose between teachers seeking "direct applicability in the classroom" and those seeking "the more distant goal of intellectual renewal," Grossman, Wineburg, and Woolworth (2000, 14) concluded that communities should be structured to involve a productive tension between the development of content-area skills and the development of teaching skills. This idea confirms Junda's (1994) findings: the balance among pedagogy, musical sightreading, and increased song repertoire significantly contributed to the positive outcome of a yearlong music teacher professional development course. Conversely, while participants in a music teacher-specific CTSG appreciated

the opportunity to look at music teaching and learning in an intense way, they did not seek to hone their musical skills at the same time (Stanley 2009).

The debate between professional development as pedagogical work or as content-area work will likely continue in the research community at large as researchers continue to investigate the elements of professional development that best translate to improved student achievement in the classroom. The CTSG model seems to be able to sustain both views. Regardless, school districts often answer the professional development needs of their music teachers by offering training on topics outside of the area of music teaching. While these areas can offer music teachers a wider curricular picture of their school district, this approach is not suitable for developing competency in teaching and learning in the complex core academic area of music. Music teacher professional development should be unfailingly oriented around music pedagogy and/or content. School districts may find the CTSG model a cost-effective way to provide professional development for music teachers. This relatively small number of teachers within a district still deserves the highest quality, most subject-centered professional development possible.

### Diverse Teacher Goals and Roles

Professional development that derives its impetus and energy from participants offers teachers a valuable sense of initiative and control over their own learning. In the CTSG model, members must participate along multiple pathways and assume various roles throughout the process. Teacher study group researchers (e.g., Curry 2008; Grossman, Wineburg, and Woolworth 2000; Stanley 2009) found that teachers are best able to pursue community goals when the hierarchy of the group is fluid. I have found that members of a CTSG are able to take on varied formal roles within the group—host, facilitator, presenter, note-taker—as well as informal roles—questioner, supporter, cheerleader, authority, novice. These constant shifts equalize power within the group, and no one person is required to be an expert all the time. A democratic, symmetrical power structure for meetings helps teachers invest in the process and feel ownership of the group and its collective bank of ideas. The sense of symmetry derives from the collective feeling that each member will act as a leader and a follower at various times throughout the experience, and the sense of democracy derives from the process of making decisions by majority agreement.

Gruenhagen has noted that “professional development must be teacher-centered, growing organically from local context with teachers leading and taking responsibility for learning opportunities” (2008, 183). That said, it is important to note that groups with one main leader may still function as egalitarian and teacher-centered, if the facilitation is gentle and the guidance adaptive. A helpful approach is to designate one main organizer or scheduler as the communications hub and manager of logistical details; however, the primary point

of such a leadership approach is to ensure that the group’s goals are shared and malleable, not fixed on one conception of expertise imposed by a more knowledgeable “other.”

In Craig’s work, an “imposed version of community not only [is] incommensurate with the image of community that the teachers intuitively live . . . but also significantly interfere[s] with the formal knowledge they [are] attempting to come to know in practice-altering ways” (2009, 616). This finding testifies to the need for teachers to exert control, flexibility, and ownership over their own community. A CTSG should not impose an implacable vision of community on its members; rather, the group should strive for “shared vision, consistent and inclusive avenues of communication, and shared leadership” (Nelson et al. 2008, 1,298).

Organizers of music teacher CTSGs should find ways to give each member a unique and changeable voice within the group, avoiding the tendency to establish a single leader. Mechanisms within the group, such as the practice of taking turns in group facilitation, should be put in place to ensure that each person has the opportunity to contribute in various ways. In this way, novice teachers can be assisted to assert their views and career veterans can be led to question longstanding practices.

### Ways to Examine Teaching Practice and Structure Conversation

One area that deserves thoughtful consideration is the need for accurate, transparent views into real classrooms—“publicly available features of practice” (Little 2003, 918) and to accomplish this insight without threatening teachers’ autonomy, privacy, or self-confidence. The teaching profession has strong norms of privacy and autonomy (Little 1990), which are inadvertently reinforced by the literal and figurative isolation faced by many music teachers. CTSGs can offer a way to transcend these tendencies—teachers can be relieved and reassured by breaking down the strong barrier of privacy and allowing others to enter and demonstrate that challenging scenarios have been experienced and dealt with by many teachers in various ways. The use of classroom video in a CTSG can open up previously unseen realms of teaching for discussion (Junda 1994; Robbins 1995) and shift group discourse from a teacher-centered focus to a clearer look at what students are actually doing and learning (Sherin and Han 2004; Stanley 2009).

Sessions in which teachers simply talk about teaching can leave participants skeptical about what really goes on in other locales and uncertain about how to translate ideas into their own context. Teaching practice is almost always made fuzzy by the language of its retelling, but viewing real teachers instructing real students is one of the most pragmatic foundations for rational conversation about music education.

Teacher study groups that formally examine student work (Allen and Blythe 2004; Little et al. 2003; Stanley 2009; West 2010) encourage teachers to initiate targeted conversations

about real, visible teaching practice and student outcomes. Often, these discussions may be organized using protocols calling for description, analysis, and speculation on evidence from student work or video. Little et al. (2003) have examined the use of protocols and found that they provide mechanisms for fostering forthright talk and avoiding labels and methodological defensiveness. However, the groups that have been most successful in achieving these goals are those groups that were flexible enough to adapt general protocols for local purposes. One difficult aspect of this flexibility was the lack of time available for other discussion, because teachers consistently wanted to talk about wider topics in teaching and schooling. Nonetheless, protocols are one logical way to organize discussion and manage potential unproductive conflict. This approach is not in opposition to the democratic nature of successful communities; in and of themselves, protocols do not govern the power or ability of people to share opinions and ask questions; rather, they organize the discussion (much like parliamentary procedure organizes tough debates) and, in fact, can create a safe atmosphere for asking questions.

The establishment of group standards of behavior, or norms, is a task that cannot be slighted. Nelson et al.'s study of a three-year professional development effort in collaborative inquiry groups demonstrated that "explicit, continual attention given to developing and revisiting collaborative norms" is crucial to a group's function as a learning community, despite the fact that efforts to constantly re-establish shared expectations consume a great deal of time (2008, 1,290). The norms pay dividends in terms of members' sense of freedom to take risks and ability to return to a stance of inquiry, rather than disagreement, when tensions arise.

Many groups spend a few moments at the first meeting to discuss norms. While setting aside this time is a good start, the list of criteria for what it means to be a *collaborative* teacher study group needs to evolve at every meeting and emerge from the needs of the particular membership. Groups often find it beneficial to start with etiquette-type considerations about issues such as taking turns and wording comments before moving into deeper ideas, such as always assuming good intentions, when or if complete consensus needs to be reached, and how to maintain a questioning stance of open-mindedness.

Members of music teacher CTSGs are likely to represent diverse views of music teaching and learning and espouse allegiances to various music education methodologies. In my experience, this diversity, with its inevitable misunderstandings and assumptions, can fuel volatile conversations. A video analysis protocol based on the objective discussion and analysis of classroom situations can often defuse these debates—viewing real children making music tends to remove some of the emotion and limit assumption-based judgments. I recommend that music teachers create norms that can help deter the practice of labeling instructional strategies and foster respectful, inclusive discussion that em-

phasizes music teaching outcomes over specific methods of delivery.

### Teaching Assignments within Group Membership

Kaleidoscopic possibilities exist for the composition of a musical CTSG: all music teachers from one age level; all music teachers from one area such as orchestra or chorus, but different grade levels; a mix of music teachers with varied assignments and age level; or a mix of music and non-music teachers. When factoring in teachers from the same or different school districts, even more variables come into play.

All versions have their individual advantages. For example, a single-district, vertically aligned CTSG with music teachers from several schools and grade levels would be powerful in terms of strengthening the intradistrict communication and curricular organization that are so often found lacking by teachers. If an elementary general music teacher participated in a CTSG along with beginning, middle, and high school band teachers in his or her district, the focus on structured, video-based discussion might clarify similarities and differences in P-12 music education and provide an honest examination of student learning that might help bridge gaps between grade-level curricula. However, a group of elementary teachers from different schools or districts might provide a more targeted, on-point discussion. Regardless of makeup, a supportive collective serves as an experimental milieu in which teachers are able to try new ways of thinking and talking that they can ultimately carry back to their own particular context.

### Support for Classroom Implementation

The participation of at least two members from one school in a CTSG could also help address one dilemma posed by recent research on teacher professional development: the amount of institutional support available to teachers can drastically affect their ability to make meaningful change (e.g., Glaser and Hamilton 2006; Gruenhagen 2008; Penuel et al. 2007; Robbins 1995). A problem with professional development in general and CTSGs specifically is that teachers may obtain new ideas and skills but be unable to implement them in their particular context because of the specific characteristics or idiosyncrasies of their workplace. One way to approach this problem is for districts to concentrate on providing site-specific support on both the small and the large scale. Some changes in teaching practice may require school- or district-level adjustments to scheduling, staffing, or curricula. Other changes may only require encouragement, reminders, or feedback from nearby colleagues. The participation of at least one other member from a teacher's site might help them share reflection on the CTSG throughout the process, as well as provide reinforcement for practical implementation of teaching strategies in particular classrooms. The creation of a CTSG with several members from the same school

district is a helpful start toward helping teachers connect the often scattered threads of the music education curriculum and unifying teachers' efforts to support districtwide goals.

## CONCLUSION

Professional development in teacher communities can be rich and effective when it honors the expertise of its members. This observation is not intended to diminish the important role that an authority or veteran can play. Rather, refining the wisdom of participating teachers and finding ways to bring these insights forward mines a rich resource. The knowledge that teachers can offer regarding context and practice cannot be underestimated. A CTSG offers a means for teachers to talk through what works well for them and, in the process, engage in reflective discussion with colleagues about why these approaches work.

This model of professional development contrasts with many professional development structures that are based on the presentation of information by experts to participants. Even though in some cases the expert is a practicing teacher, the format itself is not conducive to a reflective examination of teaching practice. The effect of teachers talking together to unpack teaching is profound. Strategies that seem to work well can be named, defined, and closely examined to allow teachers to understand their real efficacy in facilitating learning. Techniques that seem to work well can be changed or improved through close analysis of their role and function. A teacher who is able to work with skilled colleagues to identify and recognize the depth of a certain area of expertise may be more confident and more apt to sustain further learning and sharing in this area. Of course, effective professional development is not as simple as teachers casually sharing ideas in a circle. Rich professional development requires attention to a number of characteristics, which are detailed in this article. The unique benefits of CTSG participation may indeed evoke a culture change in professional development, as teachers, school district personnel, and other stakeholders observe the unique ways that CTSGs support teacher learning and change in practice, and subsequently improve students' musical achievement.

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