3.1: Participants’ Responses to the ELC

Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to: (1) report and discuss participants’ questionnaire responses to the ELC; and (2) discuss and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the ELC as an early childhood professional development model.

Data Collection Methods

At the end of each semester, team participants completed questionnaires on the ELC. These questionnaires are seen at Appendix A (Educators’ questionnaire) and Appendix B (Teacher Candidates’ questionnaire). While self-reported questionnaire responses must be approached with caution, they do indicate how participants responded to the ELC at the end of their action research semester. A largely qualitative approach was used to analyze the 25 questionnaire responses in the six case studies featured in this book. The participants comprised six teachers, six teachers’ assistants, six teacher candidates, and three team leaders. Some questions included a numerical scale that comprised five levels of response. These questions were analyzed quantitatively and reported in percentage terms.

Data from questionnaires were combined to reveal participants’ responses to the ELC, and the impact it had on their professional development. Themes in data responses were organized into the following four categories: (1) professional attitudes; (2) professional relationships; (3) teaching skills, and; (4) inquiry skills.

Recurring patterns in each category are highlighted in **boldface** to draw readers’ attention to them. The quantitative and qualitative findings in each category are reported in order of the strength of the finding. The implications of participants’ responses are discussed and used to evaluate the ELC as a model of early childhood professional development. The implications of participants’ responses are used to make recommendations for improved and aligned practice in early
childhood preschool settings, and in teacher education programs.

Questionnaire Findings

(1) Professional attitudes

Participants rated the development of professional attitudes as either positive or very positive, suggesting that professional attitudes are effectively developed in the ELC.

Table: 8.1: Rankings concerning the development of professional attitudes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Team Leaders</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>20%</td>
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Professional attitudes were developed through increased motivation and increased enlightenment.

Motivation

Participants’ reported increased motivation to overcome the teaching challenges they faced. New strategies introduced into classrooms put them in greater control of their teaching so they were no longer left to take care of challenges on their own. Teacher assistants reported how action research enabled them to see how new strategies worked. They had to keep learning new things to improve their practice. One teacher assistant explained how her increased motivation created “a calmer and more comfortable classroom environment.” Her job was easier when she spent less time dealing with behavioral problems.

Participants reported how increased motivation affected their job satisfaction. Greater use of child-centered teaching approaches gave children more ownership of their own learning. Enabling children to make choices and decisions helped educators better understand each child’s exact learning needs. One teacher said she had “a new appreciation of what children brought into the classroom,” and this enabled her to base her teaching on the capabilities of each child. Teachers and teacher assistants reported being more proactive with increased job satisfaction. Asking children questions that were directly related to their play enabled educators to engage more purposefully and sustain the play longer. However, unfavorable employment conditions discouraged some teachers from being proactive. Low pay rates, lack of recognition, and high stress levels deterred them from improving their practice. Other teacher-aides reported how challenging it was to use new teaching strategies because “it required (them) to think in new ways they were not used to.”

Problem-solving increased participants’ motivation. When teams identified their own teaching challenge, their participation in action research increased. Educators solved problems through more creative use of resources and...
through better interaction with children. Teachers commented how working in the ELC was a “great experience because they had developed positive attitudes towards problem-solving that affected how children learned.” One teacher commented, “I was more excited and more confident about my work. I wanted to find out if I could make things better.” For example, differentiating activities was found to increase children’s inclusion in activities and resulted in more meaningful play opportunities. However, some teacher candidates expressed concern about poor provision for boys. Because “boys rarely stood still,” problem-solving to improve physical provision was reported as crucial for an effective classroom.

**Enlightenment**

Participants were more enlightened about their practice and this affected their professional attitudes. Partnerships between teacher and teacher’s aide in classrooms promoted enlightenment. Instead of working on tasks often related to “crowd control, snacks, and toilet times,” teacher assistants’ practice was developed when they took on new classroom roles. Teacher assistants’ written observations were used to assess children’s learning and enabled the planning of next-step activities. Partnerships helped teacher assistants “know how to iron-out teaching problems that resulted in calmer routines for children and for educators.” However, some educators did not show the same level of enlightenment and showed resistance to making changes to their teaching.

**Team meetings** enabled teacher candidates to become more enlightened about their classrooms. Using child-centered teaching approaches enabled teacher candidates to be more responsive and respectful of children. Teacher candidates expected to observe in Practicum classrooms, and to teach their lesson plan assignments, but they did not expect to take on new roles required in the ELC related to overcoming teaching problems. Team leaders reported how new partnerships were formed among different early childhood classrooms and agencies involved in Practicum. The sharing and disseminating of improved teaching practices at end-of-semester conferences were particularly important. Results spread among a diverse audience of early childhood agencies promoted change, not just in one agency, but “across the board.”

**Discussion of professional attitudes**

Overall, professional attitudes were positively affected. The mixing of professional theory and practice changed professional actions in classrooms (Moyles, J. 2001, Thornton, J.S., Crim, C.L. & Hawkins, J., 2009). This was important for three reasons: (1) When educators undertook professional development in teams, they learned about theory together, and applied it consistently in their classrooms. (2) Educators’ theoretical understanding and professional practice were identified as the starting points for intervention (Harwood, Klopper, Oshanyin & Vanderlee, 2013). This ensured that new strategies were built into educators’ existing early childhood knowledge and prevented gaps and assumptions from developing. (3) New strategies that promoted new professional actions had an impact on educators’ roles and the learning opportunities they made available to children (Christ & Wang, 2013). Resistance to new practices shown by some educators suggested that changed practice was developmental and more likely to be achieved through professional development that took place over time (Engstrom, M.E. & Danielson, L. M,2006, Roehlig, Dubosarsky, Mason, Carlson & Murphy, 2011).

Educators’ self-reliance enabled them to work effectively in teams in their own classrooms, and not rely on input from outsiders (Stremmel, 2002). Despite increased requirements, and calls for more accountability, educators showed they could be trusted and were responsible for their own professional development to promote improved teaching (Helterbran
Providing for both children’s care and their learning needs was found to be at the heart of an improved early childhood curriculum. This contrasts to a current emphasis on teaching to learning standards and demonstrating outcomes. Although learning standards are often used to improve the quality of what children experience in the classroom, they can risk hyper-standardization of the curriculum that is insensitive to the needs of each child. Instead of improving provision, learning standards can inadvertently narrow what children experience in classrooms (Meisels, 2011). The elevation of educators’ roles to incorporate observation, assessment, and planning, released some of them from routine jobs. (Jones, Ratcliff, Sheehan, & Hunt 2012).

Unfortunately, poor employment conditions undermined some educators’ motivation. Until greater value is placed on the work that educators do and reflected in improved employment conditions, the impact of professional development may not improve outcomes for children as intended (Moloney, 2010; Whitebook, M., 2014).

The new role of **problem-solvers** transformed educators’ professional attitudes. Concerns in five out of six Practicum classrooms, about the poor learning experiences of boys, indicated the pervasiveness of certain teaching challenges. Therefore, if problem-solving is pertinent to improved teaching, the focus of professional development lies inside classrooms, rather than being imposed by outside agencies (Bruno, 2007). Educators’ own classroom experiences show that they themselves have a critical role in setting professional development agendas that drive their new professional actions.

Working in teams was instrumental in the development of improved professional attitudes (Picchio, Giovannine, Mayer & Musatti, 2012). This suggests that defining educators’ roles in teams, how they share and use information about children, and how their professional growth is supported, has to be more clearly articulated (Clark & Huber, 2005, Jones, et al., 2012). This is necessary to promote consistent and effective professional attitudes and practices among educators. However, until professional development is **routinely** made available to support educators, in varied early childhood agencies, the benefits of early childhood education for children may not be realized.

**Table 8.2:** Participants’ rankings for the development of professional relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
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<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Team Leaders</td>
<td>60%</td>
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</table>

Professional relationships were supported through team collaboration, interaction, understanding, responsibility, and
Team collaboration promoted strong professional relationships. Some 75% of participants said collaborative teamwork was the most important factor in promoting their professional relationships. One teacher reported, “Working in a team was a great experience because teachers were no longer left to cope with teaching challenges alone.” Teacher assistants appreciated how teamwork enabled them to hear varied perspectives about teaching challenges. Sharing ideas led to more consistent teaching in classrooms. Teamwork was beneficial for teacher candidates. Their confidence grew through involvement in teams that resulted in closer partnerships between classrooms, the college, and across the local early childhood community. Teacher candidates brought new ideas to the team. However, working in teams was intimidating to some. Creating PowerPoint and iMovie presentations throughout the semester was found to be challenging.

Collaboration with administrators was crucial to effective professional relationships. With administrators’ support, curriculum changes were implemented more easily and resources were more available. However, without administrators’ support, educators could not easily make changes in classrooms. Because administrators’ attendance at team meetings was not a requirement of the ELC, these individuals were not always aware of “remarkable” progress brought about in key curriculum areas. A lack of communication between administrators and some educators caused confusion over ELC expectations and resulted in some educators being unprepared for action research. Grant money paid to administrators to fund staff cover, and to purchase materials for action research, was interpreted as an incentive to participate. This meant that grant funding was not always used as intended.

Interaction between educators from different early childhood agencies enabled an exchange of ideas that resulted in new perspectives on practice. One educator mentioned how interaction reduced stress levels in classrooms. Interaction enabled teacher candidates to form professional relationships with educators and “fit right into the team.” Teacher candidates felt more confident when asking educators questions about their professional practice. Respect for educators’ knowledge and skills developed. Most educators interacted enthusiastically, were more open to strategies, and responsive to video findings. However, some educators were resistant to change in their teaching. This was not obvious until strategies were being implemented.

Interactions during team meetings led to improved interactions in classrooms. A sharing of knowledge among educators about children’s needs made them more responsive to children. Teacher candidates were more insightful about how they interacted with children. Better relationships resulted from teacher candidates observing children in different play situations related to the action research. One teacher candidate said she was “more confident interacting with children” because she understood more about their development. Appropriate interactions resulted in children being more accepting of her than she had expected.

Professional Understanding

Action research strengthened professional relationships. Educators described action research as “a good way to learn,” because their understanding of teaching young children was improved. One educator commented, “I am better at helping children learn because I spend less time sorting out behavior problems than before.” Educators’ improved understanding and related practice resulted in children’s play being better supported. Children showed greater resilience, and were better equipped to sort out their own problems. Team discussions helped teacher candidates gain a deeper understanding of the classroom. Recording observations and watching video footage enabled them to see how
young children learned and what their preferences were.

One teacher candidate commented how “observations opened her eyes to events that she would have missed otherwise.” Her view of the children’s capabilities evolved and she understood they were significantly more capable when given opportunities to do more. Teacher candidates were aware of the differences between children, and the complexity of creating an inclusive classroom in which each child’s needs were provided for. One candidate remarked, “There is a lot to do concerning teaching each child and using new materials, making (teaching) much more demanding than I thought.” Some teacher candidates noted that some educators’ limited knowledge of child development hindered the action research.

Responsibility

Professional responsibility was fostered by feelings of “all of us being in this together.” Shared responsibility was implemented when teams learned about the **interdependent variables** that affected the quality of their teaching. Educators singled out many teacher candidates for their diligence and willingness to learn about teaching. On the flip side, some teacher candidates showed weak time-management, resulting in some tasks being left unfinished at strategic times in the semester. Those teacher candidates were oblivious to the impact that their mismanagement had on the rest of the team, the impact on their own learning experiences and on the children’s experiences.

Time

**Release time** from teaching was essential to the development of educators’ professional relationships. It enabled the weekly hour-long team meetings to take place, which gave teams time to watch and analyze videos and plan their next action research moves.

While administrators provided release time for teachers to attend team meetings, teacher assistants were not always released. This did not necessarily defeat the purpose of the team meetings, but it did impact how consistently strategies were implemented. Although the weekly one-hour release time for team meetings was deemed a “great start,” the hour was not sufficient time for teams to implement all aspects of the action research. One team leader commented, “One hour was not long enough for the team to fully reflect on what happened each week and to understand change at a deeper level.”

Discussion of professional relationships

The ELC had positive effects on most participants’ **professional relationships.** Good opportunities were created for educators to interact, thus improving professional understanding and practice. Professional development was particularly effective when teams from different early childhood agencies worked together (Messenger, 2013).

Teachers and teacher assistants in Practicum classrooms provided the starting point to build the professional development teams (Picchio, Giovannini, Mayer & Musatti, 2012). The addition of teacher candidates and team leaders created opportunities for other varied educators to participate in action research (Watson, R., & Wildy, H. 2014).

Teams called for a changed emphasis in teacher education programs. Instead of preparing teacher candidates to work as individuals during Practicum, a team approach was preferred, preparing them to work in such a way that teaching decisions and actions would be made in a social and collaborative context (Moyles, 2001). Assignments that required teacher candidates to work in teams, helped build professional knowledge, teaching actions, and professional
relationships (Moran M.J. 2007). Teams helped teacher candidates to develop professional dispositions regarding the timely completion of assignments, and the understanding of the negative impact on the whole team when this progress was not made (McCann, E.J. & Turner, J.E. 2004; Kleyn, T., & Valle, J. 2014).

The participation of administrators was important to professional relationships (Albrecht, K. M. & Engel, B. 2007). Administrators were key decision makers, but because their involvement was not a requirement, few participated regularly.

Ideally, college faculty and administrators should communicate at the start of the ELC semester to agree on levels of participation, uses of funding, release of educators from teaching duties, and support strategies to improve teaching challenges. (Tomal, 2010).

Although implementing strategies, and making presentations supported educators’ professional growth and relationships (Dickenson & Brady, 2006), some educators showed reluctance to changed practice. They often adapted strategies to reflect what they had already done. Some educators clung tenaciously to former teaching practices, rather than undergo the changes that would have required them to rethink their practice and work in new ways (Dickenson & Brady, 2006). These findings suggest that change theory is an important addition needed to action research which prepares educators to anticipate the difficulty of changing their practice.

Interaction between educators during team meetings improved how teacher candidates interacted with children in classrooms (Jalongo & Isenberg, 2000). Teacher candidates’ growing knowledge and confidence enabled them to effectively relate to children in ways that better supported children’s learning. This was evident as teacher candidates took on new practices that prepared them to provide for children’s individual learning needs. The transfer of knowledge from team meetings to classroom practice suggested that teacher candidates’ growth is a shared responsibility during Practicum and is not something teacher candidates should be expected to do alone.

One-hour weekly team meetings provided regular release time for teams to meet, but this was insufficient time to plan, carry out, and reflect on teaching changes as they happened (Whittington, Thompson & Shore, 2014). In addition, some teacher candidates’ poor time management meant tasks were not completed on time. These findings suggested that sufficient time for professional development has to be provided during Practicum to: facilitate team meetings; foster professional interaction; ensure all aspects of the action research work is completed in the semester and develop teacher candidates’ professional dispositions concerning the timely completion of tasks.

(3) Teaching skills developed in the ELC

Participants reported that the following teaching skills were developed: using child development knowledge; recording assessment; incorporating content area knowledge; and alignment with learning standards.

**Child Development Knowledge**

*Very positive and positive* rankings were recorded regarding the use of child development knowledge.
Table 8.3: Participants’ ratings for using child development

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<th>Participants</th>
<th>Very positive</th>
<th>Positive</th>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Assistants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Candidates</td>
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<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Leaders</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>20%</td>
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</table>

Most educators reported their use of child development knowledge was improved. Knowledge of 3- to 5-year-old children’s development, and how to apply it in their teaching actions, was reinforced through reference books. The book, *Yardsticks*, was described as a “practical resource” that enabled educators to review the typical characteristics of 4-year-olds, and the factors that affected their development (Wood, 2007). Child development charts helped teams understand 4-year-olds’ growth patterns, their capabilities, their curriculum needs, and how to incorporate these in their teaching. One teacher commented, “It is helpful to have child development theory woven into the action research, because then we know that our actions are right for our children.” One teacher candidate said, “I no longer guess how to approach my teaching. Instead, child development knowledge provided me with an accurate understanding of the needs of 4-year-olds, and what I have to include in my teaching during Practicum.”

Improved child development knowledge strengthened educators’ awareness of each child as an individual learner. Teams were reminded of how each child’s individual learning needs were affected by their home background, ability, gender, socio-economic status, and culture. Well-developed observation skills were recognized as essential for educators to understand each child’s individual needs, and especially so for younger children, and for those who came from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds. One teacher candidate commented that, “The individual nature of each child’s development means there is no ‘best way’ to teach all young children at the same time. Instead, I must understand each child’s different developmental characteristics and modify activities so they promote each child’s participation.” Creating an inclusive classroom in which each individual child’s needs were met was difficult. Several teacher assistants pointed out how a strong attachment to each child was essential in order to understand their developmental needs.

Developmental charts helped teams assess the suitability of teaching strategies as they related to children’s needs. One team leader commented, “It was no good using a teaching strategy that was inappropriate for 4-year-olds, because we would end up with more problems than we started with.” One teacher commented, “The impact of poverty and culture is ‘huge’ in my classroom. I have to consider these factors in how I teach.” Teachers forged a match between children’s age and stage of development, their general and individual learning needs, and the activities they made available to children. One team leader reported how knowledge of child development enabled educators to have better insights into what children did at particular stages of development. This meant their teaching was more “on target, and took account of individual development.”

Teacher candidates’ knowledge of child development domains ensured that content areas were taught appropriately. Including literacy across the curriculum helped build children’s skills in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Children’s—and particularly boys’—intellectual growth in math, science, and social studies content areas were then...
supported. Children’s **emotional development** was found to be supported by teaching content knowledge in literacy, science, and creative arts. This was identified as “huge for boys because it helped them cope and interact better with others in the classroom.” Teaching content knowledge in ways that incorporated **physical development** enabled children’s free movement which was found to have a positive impact on behavior. One candidate explained how “enabling children to move in activities allowed them to use their bodies to take their learning forward. At the same time, children stay calm.”

Most educators said content knowledge was best taught in a **play-based** curriculum because this ensured the learning was exactly right for each child’s development. A play-based curriculum required the provision of engaging **learning environments** that had well equipped play-centers for children to use. One teacher commented how “…grant funding had increased the range of physical equipment in the classroom, making it possible to observe the videos that showed how children made progress towards learning goals.” One teacher assistant described how “…since applying strategies, and making more materials available,” dramatic differences in English language arts and math learning developed during circle time. Some educators, however, had concerns about using play-based practices, because the support systems needed to make them work were often lacking. Administrator support was sparse, professional development opportunities were limited, materials were in short supply, and a high-turnover of staff affected the effectiveness of play-based teaching.

Most educators recognized that **choice** fostered children’s decision-making in play. Children were motivated through choice, and when given opportunities, readily made decisions about what they wanted to do. Another educator commented how “…offering children choice required me to be flexible and listen to what they said. I had to hold back and allow the child to tell me what she wanted.” A third teacher candidate said, “children’s own ideas are right there, if you listen to them.”

Efficient use of **time** in the daily routine was identified by educators as important. One teacher candidate reported, “Allowing children to have long periods of unbroken time during indoor and outdoor play sessions ensures they have opportunities to think.” Making **links** between concepts that children explored during free-play times, small-group times and large-group times, enabled children to have repeated opportunities to explore and understand concepts.

### Recording Observations

Table 8.4: Participants’ ratings concerning the recording of observations

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<th>Participants</th>
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<th>Positive</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Assistants</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Candidates</td>
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<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Leaders</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
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</table>

Participants’ ratings suggested that the recording of observations was a highly effective assessment tool. New teaching skills, employed by teacher assistants specifically observing and assessing children, helped them use strategies to help
children make progress. Recording observations ensured that children’s learning was monitored and the impact of teaching strategies was seen. Observations of children were commonly recorded under content areas, e.g., math or science. Teacher assistants reported, “Observation made me look more carefully at what children did and made me appreciate their different learning abilities.” Another said, “Observation showed how children explored literacy, math and science concepts in play. I see now how I have to reflect that exploration back in my teaching.” By closely observing a teacher candidate reported, “I know how to support children’s play more effectively, by making enough resources available for them to use.” Another said how observation enabled her to better read the classroom and problem-solve during team meetings. She said, “I have evidence and have something definite to say about children’s learning.”

New teaching strategies led to changes in assessment roles. Teacher assistants reported how teachers commonly wrote observations of children. However, some teacher assistants took on new observation roles during small and large-group times that released teachers to focus more on teaching. Teacher assistants worked in partnership with teachers when they shared written observations, assessed children’s responses, and planned differentiated activities that responded to children’s exact learning needs. Other teacher assistants commented how, “New roles in observation increased professional knowledge about what children learned and what activities were needed to promote their next-steps in learning”.

Analysis of observations promoted better differentiation of activities. Opportunities existed for each child to respond uniquely by experimenting with materials, and producing different outcomes in play. Teacher candidates explained how during socio-dramatic and in play centers, each child made unique artifacts, that showed their individual thinking. Planning open-ended activities enabled differentiation that was supportive of each child’s abilities and needs. One teacher candidate commented how satisfying it was to see a child succeed in activities that were planned from observations recorded on video. Children with language delays were asked open-ended questions about how they felt, and responded by pointing to a face on a feelings chart. The addition of more materials supported inclusion as each child’s socialization and movement needs were met. This was found to be particularly useful when supporting children with complex behavioral problems.

Video recordings revealed what educators missed in written observations. The entirety of children’s learning, including classroom context, children’s ideas, language use, and socialization patterns were captured on video. Teachers said, “Children’s progress was often under-documented in written observations, and this had serious implications for the accuracy of their reported attainment.” Video recordings enabled participants to gain a deeper understanding of children’s learning. Teams observed each child both as an individual and also as part of a group. Team viewings were thorough and enabled the planning of activities to support a child’s individual needs at designated times in the daily routine. For example, language activities were intentionally planned for circle times, to expand the limited vocabulary of individual children during work-time. Repeated viewings revealed how multiple learning domains and content areas were integrated in play. One teacher explained that math games used in circle time included, “not just the intellectual domain but also social, physical, and language domains.”

Videos enabled a complete record of events in classrooms to be assessed, including the impact of strategies. Teachers identified how checklists helped in analyzing videos. Analysis was difficult because, “observations happened at the speed of lightning,” making it easy to lose track of what to look for. Checklists kept teams focused and ensured that strategies were assessed consistently. They enabled educators to count the number of times particular behaviors occurred, and therefore, evaluate the success of a strategy. Checklists were seen as a positive tool for teams to use because they provided evidence of change resulting from strategy implementation.
Educators reported that there was not enough time during team meetings to analyze all observations recorded on video. Teams needed more time to develop a deeper understanding of observations seen on video, and to reflect on events. One educator said, “Finding time to watch the videos was a problem, because it had to be done on a regular basis in order to be able to stay on top of what happened in classrooms.”

Applying Content Area Knowledge

Table 8.5: Participants’ ratings concerning the application of content knowledge

<table>
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<th>Positive</th>
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<tr>
<td>Team Leaders</td>
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Teaching content through integration rather than through separate content areas was identified as appropriate for young children because they were not aware of separate content areas in their play. One team leader described how literacy, math, arts and technology were fully integrated in a book making activity.

Using Learning Standards

Table 8.6: Participants’ responses concerning the use of learning standards

<table>
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<th>Participants</th>
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<tr>
<td>Team Leaders</td>
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regarding State Standards.” A purchased curriculum was used in another setting to ensure state literacy learning standards were met. In another, state kindergarten standards were used to prepare children in Pre-K for the next grade level. Head Start teams used the Head Start Early Learning Framework Outcomes to guide their teaching of separate content areas. Teacher candidates were familiar with NAEYC Standards (2009) and described them as “a great resource to guide their teaching during Practicum.” Their understanding of NAEYC Standards (2009) was helped by reading NAEYC journal articles that showed them what NAEYC Standards looked like in practice. One teacher candidate commented, “The journals helped me see how important developmentally-appropriate practice is, and how each lesson should have a definite learning purpose that reflects standards.”
Discussion of Teaching Skills

When child development was included in action research, educators targeted their teaching to children's current learning needs. The use of child development literature helped teams fully acknowledge children's typical and atypical developmental characteristics. Children's developmental characteristics influenced what teams did to improve their teaching. Teams checked the appropriateness of teaching strategies alongside the developmental characteristics of children in their classrooms. The developmental appropriateness of teaching strategies was not commonly reported on in journal articles, but consideration of this factor, ensured teams used strategies that were relevant to children's developmental needs. Beneficial opportunities existed in the ELC to use content area knowledge to further develop children's learning (Baldwin, Adams, & Kelly 2009). Child development and content area teaching were both required in Standards. However, to effectively combine both elements in teaching, professional development and teacher education programs need to routinely incorporate these factors, to ensure provision is well-targeted, purposeful and challenging to both children's and teacher candidates' learning (Sakellariou, Rentzou, 2011).

Play-based learning, in which children made choices, was widely supported among educators. However, the necessary inputs enabling children's choices regarding sufficient space, time, and materials in the classroom were often lacking (Mooney, 2000). Until educators and teacher candidates routinely assume the responsibility to organize and equip classroom environments in ways that facilitate children's choices, the quality of children's learning experiences in classrooms will be compromised (Thornton, Crim, & Hawkins, 2009).

Using developmental domains as the basis to teach content knowledge was identified as important. When social, physical, linguistic, intellectual, and emotional developmental domains were evident in teaching, educators expressed confidence that children's learning needs were comprehensively met. However, the creative domain was often poorly provided for (Kirkwood, Beavers, 2013). Until the creative domain, that underpins young children's thought and expression, is routinely provided for, the needs of the "whole child" are not met and learning is not balanced.

Observations were critical for educators to have accurate information about each child's learning. Observations helped educators understand their teaching roles and provided for informed discussions during team meetings (Recchia, Beck, 2014). Although educators supported integrated learning approaches, their observations were commonly recorded under content knowledge areas in line with learning standards, rather than child development domains. Observation recorded under content knowledge areas emphasized children's academic learning at the expense of their progress in developmental domains.

Team responses showed broad support for video recordings over written observations (Fadde & Sullivan, 2013). This was because efficient and accurate recordings enabled teams to watch recordings together to evaluate the impact of strategies on teaching challenges, on children's learning, and on educators' practice. Although videos generated accurate recordings of some classroom activity, they did not capture "in the moment" events that were often documented by educators in written observations. Although both written and video-recorded observations were found to be valuable in the documentation of children's progress and the impact of strategies, educators reported they did not have sufficient time to watch and analyze videos (Beck, King, Marshall, 2002).

Some new teaching strategies resulted in more complex teaching roles for educators. These strategies freed teachers to focus on their teaching, while teacher assistants recorded observations of children's learning. New teaching roles showed examples of how educators worked in partnerships. Embracing new teaching roles allowed them to use more
advanced teaching skills more directly connected to children’s learning than they had done previously (Leggett, Ford, 2013). Using checklists to analyze video recordings enabled educators to focus and interpret what they saw. A better organized approach to assessment resulted in planning differentiated activities that improved the inclusion of children with exceptional needs (Griess, Keat, 2014). Team responses consistently identified that sufficient time was not always available for them to implement new teaching skills. However, time has to be made available if educators are to understand why particular practices are more effective than others in supporting children’s and teacher candidates’ learning (Lind, 2007).

Most educators thought that content knowledge was best taught in an integrated approach because it enabled them to build onto what they observed in children’s play. Activity planning did not feature largely in the action research but educators said that “play reflected what children thought about and what interested them.” Educators used a variety of approaches to promote concept teaching and learning that included using observations of children’s play, standards, commercial programs, themes, and seasonal events (Neuman, 2010). However, educators did not say that they undertook research to strengthen their teaching of content. This suggested that their teaching of concepts and skills may lack depth (Moran, Desrochers, Cavicchi, 2007; Schwartz, S. and Copeland, S. (2010). Commercial programs were cited for stifling the creative planning of activities. Some educators followed scripted manuals to cover literacy content to meet required learning standards (Starnes, 2002). This suggested ambivalence existed between educators who used teaching approaches rooted in child development theory, alongside others who used teaching approaches rooted in Standards (Mooney, 2011.)

Educators’ average responses concerning the use of standards was explained by them not actually referring to a specific set of learning standards they had each used during the ELC. Individual educators implemented one of five different sets of learning standards that comprised NAEYC (2009); NAEYC early childhood program standards and criteria; DEC recommended practices; New York State Core Body of Knowledge and Competency area; and Head Start Learning Outcomes. These different sets of learning standards presented a challenge in the ELC because, while educators were familiar with the learning standards used in their own settings, they were not familiar with the different sets of learning standards used in others’ settings. As a result, teams could not reflect during team meetings on how far new strategies aligned their practices with NAEYC Standards (2009) used at the college. Instead, alignment of new practices with NAEYC Standards (2009) was carried out at the report-writing stage at the end of the semester. The absence of standard alignment tables also prevented teams from reflecting on how far their new teaching practices aligned with NAEYC Standards (2009). Two documents, The Core Body of Knowledge: New York State’s Core Competencies for Early Childhood Educators (2012), and The New York State Early Learning Alignment Crosswalk (2012), have since been published that assist in alignment across different sets of learning standards. However, a concern remains on how competency areas provided in these publications are based on perceptions of how practice should be, rather than how it really is. In addition, no recognition is given to the change process, as revealed in action research, that educators underwent as they grappled with new practices required in Standards, or in response to the complex teaching challenges they faced. The change process provided educators with new professional knowledge and skills gained through practice while working with children. Such authentic professional growth equips educators to contribute to the early childhood field in ways that ensure children’s and educators’ needs are reflected, both current and dynamic.

There is a critical need for educators and administrators involved in Practicum to regularly participate in cross-agency partnerships so that different sets of learning standards are mutually understood and aligned. Only then can an informed
foundation exist to promote consistent practice across agencies (Taylor, Hallam, Charlton, & Wall, 2014).

**Inquiry skills**

Inquiry skills comprised the use of action research, the reading of literature, data analysis and reflection.

*Very positive, positive, and average* rankings as shown in table 8.4 suggested overall inquiry skills were well developed.

Table 8.7: Ratings for inquiry skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Very positive</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
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<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Assistants</td>
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<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Candidates</td>
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<td>20%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Leaders</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Action Research**

Inquiry skills embedded in action research were reported to enable educators to better understand their own teaching. The implementation of new teaching strategies helped teachers tackle their teaching problems. Practice-related inquiry “fed right into” teacher assistants’ teaching and care of children. Teacher candidates reported that practice-related inquiry was highly supportive of their Practicum experiences because it was “real” and focused on what actually happened in their Practicum classrooms.

Even though action research was practice related, some teachers interpreted strategies in ways that led them to **repeat their current practice**. For example, following the use of a strategy designed to improve children’s literacy skills through book making, teachers continued their former practice of writing text for children. This prevented children from developing their “emergent” writing. Some teachers looked for **“new”** strategies to overcome teaching challenges, rather than considering how their existing teaching approaches contributed to challenges. Even when “new” strategies were implemented, some teachers repeated earlier practices that meant teaching challenges did not always improve.

During **team-based** action research, educators’ inquiry established common goals to improve their teaching. Power-sharing in action research resulted in greater buy-in that was supportive of coordinated teaching roles and that increased teacher candidates’ professionalism. For example, teams depended on teacher candidates to find relevant journal articles, and video classrooms to move the inquiry forward. Team-based inquiry developed teacher candidates’ problem-solving skills when they learned to keep focused on teaching challenges, contribute towards discussions, and participate in implementing new teaching practices. Purposeful interaction between teacher candidates, and other team participants, developed focused, professional relationships that promoted continuous learning about teaching over the semester.

**Thought-provoking inquiry** was fostered through action research as teachers investigated challenges and solutions and what the implications were for children. One teacher reported, “I have a new appreciation of what children bring to
the classroom now and how I have to use this in my teaching.” Teacher-aides commented, “Seeing the classroom through children’s eyes” motivated us to improve play centers and better reflect children’s choices and learning needs. Seeing children engage in more physical activity, and more willingly share materials, was encouraging, because play was sustained for longer periods of time. Thought provoking inquiry was developed between educators and teacher candidates when they discussed new applications of child development knowledge, developmentally-appropriate practice, and content area knowledge that “enabled them to include all children despite their varied ability.” Teacher candidates described how using their observation and assessment skills resulted in provision that accurately supported children’s learning needs. Consideration of the context of teaching challenges enabled teacher candidates to understand that challenges did not exist in isolation, but were directly related to children. For example, some children arrived in their classrooms upset because separation from their parents, after a long car journey, was distressing to them. Other children were unsettled because they spent up to ten hours each day in classrooms to accommodate their parents’ work routines. One teacher candidate remarked brightly, “My teaching grew a lot because I now think about children. This was a very good experience for the future.” Another said, “My thinking has expanded. I understand more about children’s lives now.”

Inquiry in action research was facilitated by video recordings that enabled teams to track what happened in classrooms over a semester. Watching videos made teams more “thoughtful about their practice and better able to do their jobs.” For example, educators created, modified, and monitored play centers to accommodate the individual language and physical needs of children. As a direct result, some educators discarded inappropriate resources. Others no longer used kindergarten standards in Pre-K classrooms and instead provided what children currently needed.

Inquiry through action research was facilitated through the one-hour weekly team meetings. Educators appreciated how they provided time to study and better understand their work. Regular opportunities existed for teams to think about the action research over the whole semester. Teachers said they were more relaxed and not as rushed. However, the weekly one-hour team-meetings were still not long enough for educators to complete all aspects of the action research.

Insufficient communication with administrators about the action research created uncertainty among teachers. Some teachers did not know whether the outcomes of action research would be integrated into current practice. Administrators’ irregular participation in the action research was unhelpful because it meant they did not understand the impact of strategies in classrooms. Because of this, effective strategies were not always supported or may not be continued in classrooms after the action research was completed.

**Literature**

Participants’ questionnaire responses showed very positive and positive rankings for the use of literature in the ELC.

Table 8.8: Participants’ responses concerning the use of literature in the ELC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
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<th>Positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Assistants</td>
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<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Candidates</td>
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<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Early_Childhood_Education/Book%3A_The_ELC_-_An_Early_Childhood_Learnin…

Updated: Fri, 24 Jul 2020 13:00:12 GMT

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Literature was identified by educators as a useful resource in promoting inquiry. By reading both reference books and journal articles, educators revised their knowledge of child development and were introduced to new strategies that supported the development of their professional attitudes, stimulated their thinking, and enabled them to review and modify their teaching (Thornton et al. 2009). Readings helped educators develop attitudes open to multiple new strategies, and to recognize that there is often more than one right way to fix teaching challenges. For an entire semester, relevant reading kept educators focused on finding and implementing a strategy to improve their teaching challenge. Team leaders said using literature was efficient because it saved teams from having to invent strategies of their own that may not work. Teacher assistants and teacher candidates said journal articles provided them with knowledge, skills, and strategies that were needed to put teaching challenges right. Journal articles were a constant reference point throughout the action research that helped teams stay on track and generated extensive team-discussion. The ability to choose a strategy was helpful because it promoted joint decision-making. However, one concern was that strategy evaluation was often missed in literature, and made judging how effective strategies might be, before they were implemented, difficult.

The librarian was instrumental in supporting teacher candidates’ data-base searches for literature. Locating relevant articles was critical to the success of the action research. However, data-base searches were problematical when some teacher candidates failed to spend enough time identifying precise key words. In some cases, wasted time adversely affected the outcomes of literature searches. Some teachers found access to articles challenging. A lack of Internet access in classrooms at the time and not being members of NAEYC explained the challenges. Obtaining articles was sometimes delayed for some teams and caused them to fall behind in their weekly schedule.

The suitability of articles was also sometimes problematical. One teacher went to the library in her own time to find articles that more closely matched her teaching challenge. Journal articles did not always match the full scope of teaching challenges and made it necessary to use more than one article at a time. Other teams preferred to use articles that were published in other journals. This was problematic because it was not known how closely aligned these articles were with NAEYC standards for teacher preparation (2009).

Data recording and analysis

Responses for data recording and data analysis indicated very positive, positive and average rankings. Overall, rankings suggested these areas featured well in the ELC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Very positive</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Assistants</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Candidates</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Video-recordings provided teams with a complete and accurate method of data recording (Knight, Bradley, Hock, Skrtic, Knight, Brasseur-Hock & Hatton, 2012). Teachers were provided with, “insightful vignettes that enabled them to see what they would otherwise have missed.” Another commented, “Videos were a valuable tool that enabled me to see child interactions in detail.” Teacher candidates reported that each child’s response was different, indicating where teaching modifications were required. One teacher candidate said, “Videos showed me how to adapt my teaching to make it more creative.” Video recordings enabled team leaders to keep track of what happened between team meetings, and understand the impact of strategies on teams and on children.

Most participants rated data analysis of video recordings as positive. Participants indicated how video analysis revealed more about themselves as educators, than they realized. One said, “I like to step back and understand each child's capabilities, what they each liked to do and what progress each child made over time”. Another teacher said, “I want to see what has improved in my teaching up to this point, and what still has to be done.” Teacher assistants said that data analysis brought “fresh eyes and multiple perspectives” about how strategies worked because unexpected things happened. For example, how often incidents occurred, what triggered them, how long they lasted, which children were involved, and what educators could do in response. Teacher candidates said that video analysis increased their knowledge of child development. One said, “Videos analysis gave concrete evidence about children’s skills so that I do not assume things.” Another commented, “I reflect back to when I thought teaching was telling children what to do, but I now know it is about me guiding their ideas so things happen in classrooms.” Videos were informative because they revealed what happened in classrooms and helped educators know what questions to ask next in action research.

However, the teacher assistants who ranked data analysis as “average” indicated that “Video cameras were initially distracting to me and to children. They did not give a true picture of classroom activity but in time children ignored them.”

**Checklists** facilitated data analysis of video recordings. Checklists consisted of agreed outcomes from teaching strategies. These lists also helped team members identify what they wanted to look for in videos, and what constituted success in improving teaching challenges. Discussing the same questions on checklists enabled teams to reflect consistently on their action research. Checklists had reassured “overwhelmed” teacher candidates to focus and contribute to discussions. Repeated viewings of videos gave teams several opportunities to check analysis and interpretations. However, insufficient time to carry out all data analysis on videos remained a concern.

**Data interpretation** provided teams with new insights into their action research. They were given more ownership of their practice, while teacher assistants commented on what was revealed about children’s learning. Evidence on checklists enabled teacher candidates to understand data interpretation discussions that helped teams interpret data and be open to new insights. For example, educators discussed whether purchased literacy programs were appropriate for children with special needs, and questioned whether teaching approaches used in elementary grades were appropriate for children in Pre-K classrooms.

When educators gained new understanding through action research they showed greater acceptance of findings and of the implications for their own classrooms. Educators discussed data collected in their own classrooms because they understood the context of it (Nelson, 2012). Educators were more open to accepting what data showed and discussed
what it meant for their own practice. Opportunities for teachers to see themselves on video were generally welcomed (Ruto-Korir & Beer (2012). Changed practices were evident through data interpretation. For example, teachers intentionally used richer language to encourage children’s decision-making during play, and used child-development theory to more accurately support children’s individual learning needs. New practices showed the impact of teaching in developmentally-appropriate ways. For example, embedding numbers into socio-dramatic play, and during circle times, was shown to be successful. Being involved in planning the “next steps” in activities enabled teacher assistants to actively teach children new relevant concepts and skills (Rossouw, R. (2009).

**Dissemination of action research findings** was facilitated by working in cross-agency teams. Sharing findings was helped by PowerPoint presentations shown at mini-conferences at the college and at early-childhood state and national conferences. Information sharing about changed teaching practices helped other educators who faced similar teaching challenges in their own classrooms, and indicated the implications for the preparation of teacher candidates in teacher education programs (Branscomb & Etheridge, 2010, Cartmel, McFarlane &Nolan, 2014).

**Reflection**

Participants’ reflections in the ELC were analyzed under the following headings: professional growth; teaching development and collaboration. Responses are reported in order of importance with a discussion section at the end.

**Professional Growth**

Participants’ identified how team reflection in the ELC promoted their professional growth. Teachers associated professional growth with a better understanding of events in classrooms. Action research made it easier to reflect because events were “real teaching experiences that were directly connected to what took place with children.”

Reflection on children’s learning in video recordings provided insights. One teacher assistants said, “It was a surprise to realize that boys were much more capable than we thought. We had it wrong, and boys could do more than we realized.” Several teacher candidates commented on the importance of “thinking about teaching before jumping and doing it” and “getting a real handle on all the aspects of teaching so it will work.” Team viewing of video recordings helped teacher candidates hear multiple perspectives that developed their own thinking and appreciation of on-going, reflective action research for their professional growth (Nolan, A. 2008). Mini-conferences resulted in better understanding that supported professional growth. When teams met together, they shared their IMovie presentations and where appropriate, replicated strategies in other Practicum settings. Other visits and team presentations spread action research results and supported professional growth among a wider early childhood audience.

Teacher candidates said their philosophy of education was developed through reflection. They built on what they learned in college courses and applied it in classrooms. Reflection helped teacher candidates conceptualize how they wanted to teach children in the future. One said, “I want to be flexible and be open to change.” Another expressed, “My own teaching grew a lot through reflection. I learned to think about my teaching in a busy classroom where there are many things to attend to at once.”

Educators identified how their professional attitudes towards working collaboratively were changed through reflection. Teachers reported that teaching is never perfect and there is always room for educators to work together to make improvements. One teacher assistant said, “It was a good idea to take and use other people’s suggestions so that we don’t have to keep reinventing the wheel.” Several teacher candidates remarked that they did not have to be frightened
to work with others or to try out different things.

A lack of questionnaire responses indicated that teams did not reflect on how well their changed teaching did or did not align with NAEYC Standards (2009) used at the college. This presented an area of concern, and was explained by teams implementing different sets of learning standards that presented a challenge to the action research. While individual team participants were familiar with the learning standards used in their own settings, cross-agency teams were not familiar with the different learning standards used in each-others’ settings. As a result, during meetings, teams could not reflect on how far new strategies aligned their practices to NAEYC Standards (2009) used at the college.

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**Teaching Development**

Educators reported how reflection supported their teaching development. Observation and assessment were critical areas for the understanding of children’s actions and abilities. One teacher candidate said, “observing and interacting with children at the same time was especially important to teaching development.” Related reflection indicated what “next-step” activities needed to be planned, and provided for children to have repeated opportunities to learn concepts. Reflection on videos enabled educators to make accurate assessments of children’s learning that provided information to support teaching development.

Applying child development and learning theory in classrooms encouraged educators to see the classroom through children’s eyes, check the impact of strategies on teaching challenges and promote teaching development. Teacher candidates identified how opportunities for children’s intellectual development were increased by giving them choices involving decision-making and problem-solving about what they wanted to learn. One reported, "I now realize that my teaching is about seeing that children have opportunities to expand their knowledge and skills."

Teaching development through improved physical provision also featured in teacher candidates’ thinking. Improved physical provision was said to promote healthy lifestyles and supported the inclusion of children with behavioral difficulties.

Teaching development resulted from applying early childhood theory and practice in ways that improved classroom challenges. New teaching knowledge and skills enabled educators to be more child-centered. For example, when they improved teaching challenges in their classrooms, they were forced to teach for the present rather than for kindergarten and 1st grade-readiness. Better insights into children’s current interests and needs allowed teachers to modify activities more readily. Educators learned about the importance of well-organized classroom layout. For example, when sensory table play was better supported and resourced, children’s concentration was sustained. Educators determined that their assumptions about sensory table play were incorrect and accepted the need for their practice to change.

Reflection was supportive of teaching development at different stages of the action research. Regular reflection enabled teams to reflect on the same issue from week to week, and develop their thinking and understanding over time. For example, one team reflected over the semester on the impact (at different stages) of an obstacle course in their classroom, regarding how it met children’s developmental and learning needs; how children used it; how educators used it in their teaching; and, finally, whether it overcame the teaching challenge. Another team reflected on the need for well-resourced classrooms with flexible routines that could enable children to move between different play centers in ways that promoted sustained play. Several educators reported how integrated teaching approaches supported children's learning in the circle, book, socio-dramatic, and art centers. Integrated teaching enables children to engage in literacy,
math, science, and creative arts activities all at the same time, and thereby experience a richer curriculum.

Teachers commented that reflection was, “both professional and personal.” One teacher said, “Reflection is part of you and shows what you believe and how you teach.” Regular weekly reflection undertaken by the whole team meant that change was progressive and affected all participants to varying degrees. Changed thinking and changed teaching was recognized as an ongoing process that depended on steps accomplished in the action research cycle. Change was most striking at the end of the semester, when current practice was compared to former practice and beliefs stated at the beginning of the semester. Reflection made it easier for some educators to make changes than for others. Some teachers said the benefits of change were obvious. Other educators were more resistant, because they thought change implied criticism of earlier teaching and care-giving practices.

Most teacher assistants said reflecting promoted their teaching development. From their ruminations on children’s learning in video recordings, most educators gained new insights into children’s thinking. For example, increasing opportunities for children’s own ideas to feature in play had a “marked effect on children’s motivation.” However, reflecting on new strategies and change was not easy for all educators. Using new approaches to behavior management “was a whole new game” for some educators who had to rethink everything they knew about working with children. Several teacher candidates reported how reflection changed their perceptions of their roles in Practicum classrooms. Change made teacher candidates move from telling children what to do and listening to children, and provide support to help them create their own ideas for play. This change fundamentally affected teacher candidates’ teaching approaches because as one teacher candidate said, “Children’s own ideas for play were so much better than mine… because they included so many imaginative ideas for learning.” Other teacher candidates reported how team reflection was an efficient way to support teaching development. Several remarked how it would have taken much longer for them to realize that “children learned on the move, in well-resourced classrooms, with responsive educators, where they made choices and decisions about what they wanted to do.”

Collaboration

Collaboration was critical to reflection because educators were provided with opportunities to learn from each other about classroom challenges and options for improvement. Educators enjoyed the social nature of collaboration because teaching ideas were exchanged that resulted in team members helping each other in classrooms. One teacher candidate remarked, “Reflection helped me expand my own ideas, but at the same time learn from others.”

In teams, educators were motivated to reflect on issues directly relevant to their own teaching. Teacher assistants reported how useful reflective collaboration was and meant that “time spent supporting children in learning activities increased and time spent disciplining children decreased.” Reflective collaboration promoted changed understanding among educators about how children learned. Teacher assistants reported how discussions enabled them to appreciate that children learned “on the move and not when they were made to stay still.”

Team leaders commented on the importance of reflective collaboration among cross-agency teams. Discussions reflected varied perspectives that enabled reflection on broad early childhood curriculum issues, e.g., what effect do scripted literacy programs have on the literacy development of children living in poverty; and what is the value of circle time unless it is differentiated to meet children’s individual needs? Discussions enabled teacher candidates to build on information they learned in college courses and reflect how it appeared in classrooms. For example, recording observations provided valuable insights into children’s learning, but recording observations and interacting with children
at the same time was demanding.

**Discussion of Action Research as an Inquiry Skill**

Broad support for practice-based action research existed among educators because it developed a deeper understanding of their own teaching in their own classrooms (Bleach, 2013). If educators, including teacher candidates, learn effectively about their teaching through action research in classrooms, then emphasis on practice-based action research is recommended in teacher education and professional development programs (Souto-Manning, Mitchell, 2010). This calls for college faculty members, community leaders, administrators, and educators in Practicum classrooms, to work in partnership to they must ensure that contextual information about settings is shared and enables practice-based action research to consistently feature in candidates’ professional development. So the early childhood workforce as a whole learns about the act of teaching through their own actions in their own classrooms.

**Video cameras,** enabled teams to inquire into their classrooms, changed educators’ roles from teaching in them to also studying the classrooms themselves. Teaching without associated study, threatens the development of better practices in classrooms. Inquiry made educators function through professional knowledge. It also forged a link between professional knowledge and professional practice that served to give most educators a better understanding of their actions in classrooms. However, some educators resisted making changes to their teaching. Change is acknowledged to be a complex and demanding process that requires energy, commitment, time, and support to bring about. The concepts of professional change for professional growth are recommended to feature more strongly in both teacher education and professional development programs so that educators understand that their learning is never “done” but is ongoing and integral to the role of teacher (Moran, 2007).

The importance of teamwork was repeated throughout the action research and showed that improved teaching was not brought about by individuals working on their own, but required educators to collaborate to be effective and consistent (Waite & Davis, (2006).

Insufficient time was made available for educators to carry out all aspects of action research over the semester. Practical problems existed because many Practicum classrooms already function for up to ten hours each day, leaving educators little or no time to meet in teams. Inconsistent participation by administrators in action research was criticized by educators. A review of how they spend their time was requested. Commitment from administrators to attend professional development team meetings and participate in professional learning themselves would support growth among educators.

**Discussion of Literature as an Inquiry Skill**

The literature places comparatively little emphasis on the critical role of teams using published research to improve teaching challenges in their classrooms. Less emphasis still is made of the contribution that educators make when they transform themselves during action research into data gatherers, evaluators, and reporters of the impact of implementing teaching strategies in their classrooms. Transformational roles enabled educators to not only use literature during team meetings, but also contribute to action research through the practical implementation of strategies focused on teaching improvement in their classrooms (Mesquita-Pires, 2012).

However, some teacher candidates did not fulfill all aspects of their team responsibilities in the action research on time.
This problem calls for teacher education faculty to address such concerns and examine how they prepare teacher candidates to work in teams during Practicum (Lattimer, 2012). A lack of internet access in classrooms prevented teams from carrying out online searches, and agencies unaffiliated with NAEYC, prevented some teams from accessing NAEYC journals online. Other teams wanted to use non-NAEYC journals, but articles in other journals may not have been aligned, or have been known to be aligned with NAEYC standards for the preparation of teachers (2009). These problems illustrated how fragmentation in settings impeded the implementation of the action research. Calls for collaboration among early childhood agencies at agency and community levels are needed to provide favorable conditions concerning the following: teacher candidates’ readiness to work in teams; internet access in classrooms; membership to professional organizations; and standards alignment among agencies in support of professional development.

**Discussion of Data Recording and Analysis as Inquiry Skills**

Checklists provided consistent ways for teams to analyze video recording data. Consistency allowed for reliable findings. The use of the same questions in checklists enabled consistent weekly discussion in team meetings that, in turn, focused team reflection. Checklists gave educators control over data analysis methods that strengthened their commitment to findings. However, 40% of teacher assistants ranked data analysis as only “average” because they questioned the authenticity of video camera recordings. This finding repeated the need for action research to be carried out within long-established professional relationships, and in safe-guarded environments that ensure both children's and educators’ participation is accurately portrayed and used ethically. Several educators reported they were self-conscious about appearing in video recordings. Such a finding shows and must only ever be used to help and never cause educators anxiety (Robson, 2011).

Data analysis facilitated by checklists, and interpretation of videos, supported teams developing new insights into the impact of teaching strategies. Checklists helped teams stay focused during data analysis. These checklists helped teacher candidates, who, as the least experienced participants, used them to support their understanding of data analysis findings. Data interpretation enabled teams to reflect on their teaching and formulate their own evaluations. The presence of administrators at this point in the action research was shown to be pivotal to the adoption of changed practices. Action research findings increased teams’ autonomy over their professional development. Collaborative data analysis increased democracy in classrooms (Bleach, 2014).

Team leaders developed leadership skills that maintained teams’ focus, and that created a link between evaluation and reflection. Team leaders were instrumental in supporting the unique professional development needs of each team. If team leaders are pivotal to the success of professional development teams, their leadership skills need to be clearly identified, conceptualized, and used to lead professional development programs. PowerPoint presentations portrayed educators in a new role as agents of change in their own classrooms. The first steps to bring educators from different agencies to work together were taken. However, more frequent interaction between different agencies was needed to build relationships that could share information for change and improvement in classrooms. A dilemma existed for teams involving video recordings that created permanent data sources about classrooms, but ironically the teams did not have sufficient time to fully analyze them.
Discussion of Reflection as an Inquiry Skill

When educators reported that professional growth developed through reflection, it was also shown to be rooted in classroom experiences. The action research model of professional growth contrasted with more common models of professional development that were unrelated to the context of classrooms and detached from educators’ own teaching experiences with children. This suggests that early childhood professional development models are most effective when they include elements educators report as crucial to their professional growth.

Reflection provided educators with deeper insights into children’s learning and their own related practice. On occasion, educators recognized that aspects of their current practice were in error (Jensen, B. Holm, A & Bremberg, S. 2013).

Reflection revealed how educators critically examined and evaluated their own practice, and worked to improve it. Therefore, when given optimum time and conditions to reflect, most educators could effectively monitor their own practice and make changes to bring about improvements. Teacher candidates showed how reflection on journal articles let them define teaching challenges more clearly, reconstructing their thinking about teaching practices. This suggests that to better prepare candidates to cope with challenges in theoretical classrooms, thinking-based, problem-solving activities based in real classrooms, should be utilized.

Team meetings gave educators regular opportunities to reflect on teaching challenges. Educators assimilated what each said to further inform their thoughts in support of their professional growth. The reported merits of team meetings, mini-conferences, and visits between settings, were striking because they fostered collaboration… with the objective of securing improved teaching in classrooms. In doing so, a professional development model existed, built on collaboration, to improve teaching knowledge and skills among participants at different stages in their professional development.

This model acted as an alternative to the more traditional external and authoritarian models that impose practices, often unrelated to the context of their classrooms, or the needs of the children in them. Educators reported how regularly scheduled reflection enabled them to examine complex aspects of their practice that may have been too demanding for educators to do on their own. With these meetings, educators were in a better position to connect observation, assessment, planning and reflection in teaching. Teams garnered a deeper understanding of how aspects of practice were best used together to create smooth teaching operations that benefitted everyone.

Educators’ knowledge of child development and learning theory was important for interpreting their findings. Firmly locating professional development models—within child development knowledge—ensured that early childhood teaching was child-centered and the impact on children was beneficial. This made educators teach to children’s current learning needs, as indicated by assessment and teaching challenges, rather than in preparation for the next grade level.

Team reflection touted the importance of well-organized and adequately resourced classrooms. Less apparent was educators’ response to classrooms that lacked those qualities. Educators are the architects of classrooms, and it is their responsibility to gather appropriate free materials, in adequate supplies, to ensure that children have what they need to develop their learning in play. Educators could, for example, ask families to provide regular clean supplies, gather seasonal natural materials, and ask local businesses to donate surplus items

Weekly reflection over a semester revealed how educators’ thinking developed at different times and in different ways.

https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Early_Childhood_Education/Book%3A_The_ELC_-_An_Early_Childhood_Learnin…
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The pivotal role of team leaders in asking focused questions, was to reveal the thinking that hindered action research progress. The different starting points among educators, and the different rate at which they were able to comprehend issues, were highlighted. Team leaders’ leadership skills were instrumental in team progress and needed to be harnessed for use in professional development programs.

Reflection clearly affected educators’ personal and professional development. Some showed their adaptability by comparing their earlier and later thinking about the teaching challenges they faced, and revealed their attitudes toward change. By acknowledging former thinking, opportunities were created to express new insights that demonstrated their enlightenment about optimum conditions for both children’s learning and for their teaching. Change was more difficult for some educators than for others. This suggested that professional development is most effective when carried out over an extended period, within a supportive professional relationship, to bolster professional growth.

Reflection was easier to achieve by working in teams. Social and collaborative teamwork enabled educators to discuss their action research together, and to help each other with their teaching. The explosion of online forums will serve to facilitate this in the future.

Educators’ responses suggest it is right to require educators to use social and collaborative approaches to teaching, because of the useful impact they have on wise decision-making in early childhood classrooms. The implications for teacher preparation programs suggest that teacher candidates be prepared, not as teachers who independently carry out their own practices and assignments, but as educators who work collaboratively to carry out assignments with input and support from others. Teams in the ELC were comprised of educators who worked in different agencies. However, historical factors explain the different practices, curricula and learning standards in different agencies involved in Practicum. These factors are overshadowed by the unifying truth that there is only one early childhood field in which teaching challenges are to be dealt with, in ways that benefit for the whole early childhood field, and for all individuals involved in it. The need for more collaboration between agencies, so that coordinated responses are effectively developed towards consistent professional actions, is clear.

### Conclusion

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<th>Factors</th>
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<tr>
<td>ELC design</td>
<td>Created professional development model aimed at improving teaching challenges and improving consistency between teaching in college and practice during Practicum field experience.</td>
<td>Enabled professional development teams consisting of participants from college, the community and Practicum settings to be formed. Allowed improved practice to develop and spread across settings to build greater consistency of practice.</td>
<td>It was not understood in the grant design that different sets of learning standards were used at the college and different and varied learning standards were used in Practicum settings. Team participants’ unfamiliarity with the different sets of standards and a lack of published alignment tables made alignment between college teaching and Practicum practice impossible to achieve during the semester.</td>
<td>To promote consistent practice in Practicum settings, it is necessary that learning standards and standards alignment tables are published and distributed concurrently to colleges and to Practicum settings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educators’ professional</td>
<td>Teams’ professional development occurred through studying teaching</td>
<td>In all case studies, when new teaching strategies were</td>
<td>Some educators resisted using new strategies and resisted changed practice because it undermined their control in the classroom.</td>
<td>Emphasize in literature and in standards documents that children’s play is a most effective vehicle to bring about educators’ improved teaching. Professional development is best undertaken over time because time is needed for some educators to change their practice.</td>
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<td>development</td>
<td>challenges based in their own classrooms</td>
<td>strategies were embedded into the context of children’s play, the</td>
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<td>strategies were effective in improving both the teaching challenges and educators’ practices.</td>
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<td>Literature</td>
<td>Teams carried out data-base searches to find developmentally</td>
<td>Candidates became readers of literature that built their professional</td>
<td>It was not always possible to find just one research article that</td>
<td>Register teams for NAEYC Membership. Organize Internet access in classrooms to ensure professional literature can be accessed whenever needed.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>appropriate literature related to the teaching challenges they faced</td>
<td>knowledge and skills.</td>
<td>addressed one teaching problem. It was sometimes necessary to use more than one journal article. A lack of Internet access in classrooms hindered the accessing of literature.</td>
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<td>in their classrooms.</td>
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<td>Technology</td>
<td>Technology enabled teams to investigate and record data about their</td>
<td>Video-recording enabled teams to see and understand teaching challenges</td>
<td>One-hour weekly team meetings did not provide enough time for team viewing and analysis of all videos and audio tapes</td>
<td>Equip each Practicum classroom with the technology and electronic devices they need. Allow more time during team meetings to analyze collected data so findings are evident and understood by the team.</td>
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<td>teaching challenges.</td>
<td>and collaborate for improvement. Audio tapes enabled team meeting</td>
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<td>discussions to be recorded, downloaded and stored for analysis. IMovie</td>
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<td>presentations enabled teams to share their teaching improvements at</td>
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<td>local and state conferences.</td>
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<td>Action</td>
<td>Teams followed a prescribed professional development</td>
<td>Teams turned into problem-solvers, data gatherers and decision</td>
<td>Some educators resisted change.</td>
<td>Recommended that professional development time has to be specified</td>
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<td>Research</td>
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<td>format.</td>
<td>directly to their own classroom practice. Inbuilt discussion and reflection time ensured professional growth.</td>
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<td>in educators’ contracts of employment.</td>
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