Chapter 2
Annals, Chronicles, and Narratives of Collaborative Professional Growth:
An Examination of a Longstanding Knowledge Community

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines how interactions within an educator group contributed to their organic evolution into a knowledge community that enhanced members' professional growth and provided support systems to sustain educators in the field for 25+ years. White's concept of annals, chronicles, and narratives is employed as an analytical lens through which to examine the interactions over time of the portfolio group. Exemplars highlight how stories shared and shared stories, critical friendship, and a centerpoint of practice were at the center of the group's interactions and key to sustaining the group. The chapter also illuminates the nurturing spaces at the heart of the framework in which teachers thrive, grow professionally, and live their best-loved selves.

INTRODUCTION

Background

This chapter explores the professional growth of teachers/teacher educators within a long-standing knowledge community (Craig, 1995; Craig et al., 2020) situated in the mid-southern United States (US), delving into the groups' influencing factors which contribute to educators' persistence in the field. Established in 1998, the Portfolio Group was originally a PK-12 educator group with a university-based leader/facilitator, whose members currently hail from PK-20 education contexts. The authors are all long-standing members in this learning community. From the outset, the Portfolio Group has been a cross-institutional and cross-disciplinary collaborative. Formed during the school reform era of the 1990s to mid-2000s, the group's initial aim was to develop alternate evaluation documentation for grant purposes. The Portfolio Group has provided educators with trusted spaces in which to story/restory their experiences, to reflectively examine practice, to receive mindful feedback, and to share knowledge and expertise. Relational interactions within the group and the shifting focus of group projects aligned with members' career paths, practice, and particular interests have been instrumental to their individual professional growth and a key factor in sustaining the group over time.

Purpose

This chapter examines how the interactions within the Portfolio Group contributed to its organic evolution as a knowledge community that has enhanced members' professional growth and provided support systems that sustain educators in the field. White's (1981) concept of annals, chronicles, and narratives is employed as an analytical lens through which to examine group members' interactions over time. Carefully crafted exemplars (Mishler, 1990) highlight how stories shared (individual experiences retold/restoried within the group) and shared stories (experiences common to the group) were at the center of the group's interactions and from which the exemplar chronicles and narratives flow. The chapter also illuminates the nurturing spaces at the heart of the framework in which teachers can thrive, grow professionally, and animate their best-loved selves (Schwab 1954/1978; Craig, 2017, 2020a).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Teacher Learning Communities

Teacher discussion and collaboration in learning communities as a way to improve teaching and schools has had a long presence in the professional education landscape (Dewey, 1929; Hargreaves, 2019; Wood, 2007a). Lieberman and Miller (2008) point out that "teachers who are members of learning communities develop the capacity to extend their ideas of what a teacher can do beyond the usual boundaries of the classroom" (p. 26). Teacher learning communities have been shown to foster school and institution change (Vescio et al., 2008; Wood 2007b) and lead to changes in teacher beliefs and improvements in teacher practice and student learning (Borko 2004; Tam, 2015). Leadership and teacher accountability systems, however, greatly limit or stifle the deep changes in practice that are needed in teaching and learning.

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