



**New Visions for Public Schools/Fund for Teachers
Summer Fellowship Program
in
New York City**

Evaluation Report 2006



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Introduction

The Fund for Teachers (FFT) collaborates with New Visions for Public Schools (NVPS) to award grants to teachers in New York City that support summer learning experiences of their own design. In a marked shift from traditionally structured professional development, this approach grows out of the belief that (a) teachers, like engineers, physicians, and lawyers, need incentives and supports to explore their profession, enrich their understanding of subject-area content, and to implement new ways to engage students; and (b) when given the opportunity to do so in an unscripted manner, teachers will channel their dedication and passion for learning into meaningful and authentic experiences that positively influence their roles as instructional leaders and lifelong learners.

Indeed, the growing expectations for teachers are generating extensive interest in the structure, content and quality of the professional development of teachers. States and school districts are re-thinking their training activities to ensure that they are “in-sync” with how teachers learn best. Major foundations, like The Fund for Teachers, are investing in research studies of professional development to identify effective practices and to better understand why they work.

What does the research say about the professional development of teachers?

For many teachers, professional development translates into an afternoon workshop—an inservice that addresses the latest “hot” topic that may or may not be relevant to teachers’ needs. In fact, in most schools, professional development is characterized by

- periodic inservice days;
- generic workshops that offer little continuity or application;
- the transfer of knowledge and discrete skills from “the experts” to teachers; and
- pull-out events and/or add-ons to the regular school day.

These short and isolated activities seldom provide any follow-up assistance, and subsequent inservices may cover entirely different topics. Rarely are teachers helped to think about what the inservice content means for their classrooms, or supported as they apply the content with students.

Research on what constitutes good professional development is remarkably consistent across many studies. As synthesized by Hawley and Valli (1999), high quality teacher training

- is integrated with school goals to improve education;
- is guided by a coherent long-range plan;
- is designed according to teacher identified needs;
- provides a strong foundation in subject content and methods of teaching;
- incorporates principles of adult learning;
- provides sufficient time and resources to complete; and
- is continuous, providing follow-up support for further learning.

A number of new approaches to professional development – consistent with these principles – have attracted the attention of educators and researchers, among them the teacher-directed research project. The Fund for Teachers offers a unique opportunity for teachers to compose, direct, and implement their own professional development project, one that has the potential to enrich the knowledge and skills of teachers and their students.

The New York City Fund for Teachers Summer Fellowship

In the fourth year of its operation in New York City (2005-06), the FFT commissioned **MAGI Services**, an independent research and consulting firm, to conduct an external evaluation of the Summer Fellowship. Using a systems-based approach, we examined the context for the program, and factors that governed its implementation and impact. Our research questions were the following:

1. What was the context for the FFT Summer Fellowship?
2. How was the recruitment and application process perceived?
3. In what content areas did Fellows pursue their learning and to what extent did they implement it?
4. What impact did the Summer Fellowship have on participants—their teaching practices, perceptions of their profession, and benefits?
5. What impact did the program have on participants' perceptions of student benefits?
6. What applicant characteristics were associated with improved classroom practice and how may this inform the application process?
7. What recommendations can be made for improving the process and management of the New York City FFT program?

Method

Our conceptual design was based on a careful review of the research literature on teacher-directed professional development. We used three data collection tools.

Survey

Items for the teacher survey were drawn from our review of the literature and from MAGI's bank of standardized items. All FFT Fellows completed the survey, which was given in a pre/post fashion: once prior to the summer experience, and again upon their return to their schools in Fall 2006. The instrument gathered data on participant demographics (years of teaching experience, grade level and subject taught, highest degree earned, certification status), teaching practices, perception of professional roles, extent to which learning was implemented, obstacles to implementation, expectations and benefits of the Fellowship for themselves, their students and their schools, and recommendations for improving the Fellowship. In all, 53 completed surveys were analyzed¹ (100% return rate).

Focus group interview

Two focus group interviews were conducted: a) a sample of four members of the selection committee were interviewed to ascertain their perceptions of the applicant selection process, its strengths, and weaknesses and how it may be improved in future years; b) six FFT Fellows participated in a post-experience focus group session that provided in-depth data on their motivation for participation, the manner in which they were implementing their learning and departures from intended use, areas in which they benefited, and suggestions for improvement.

Case study

In order to document how the Fellowship was experienced at the individual teacher level, we followed two participants through various phases of the program. They completed individual interviews prior to launching their experience, during the Fellowship, and after their return. The rich narrative gathered in this qualitative fashion provided a balanced perspective to our findings.

The following chapter describes our key findings. Unless otherwise specified, the text, comments, and charts are based on the responses of all participants.

¹Of these, surveys from 46 respondents were matched on a pre/post basis.

Key Findings

What was the context for the FFT Summer Fellowship?

The Fellows were a fairly homogeneous group, as defined by their demographic characteristics.

- Most (80%) had master's degrees.
- 83% were high school teachers, 9% were middle school teachers, and 8% taught elementary level students.
- About two-thirds (62%) acquired their certification via a traditional route –college coursework and student teaching—and the remaining came to the profession via an alternative pathway (38%).
- Similarly, 64% of Fellows had between three and five years teaching experience.
- Data from 18 applicants suggested that the predominant ethnic group represented was Caucasian, with a small minority that was Asian.

The Fellows differed on aspects of teacher certification.

- Participants varied in their subject areas of certification. The majority was certified to teach English, although some had credentials in other subjects: mathematics, science/biology, social studies, Spanish, art, and special education.
- About 55% were permanently certified, 40% had provisional certification, and 5% had conditional certification.

The FFT cohort was demographically more exclusive than the (New York) citywide group of teachers.

- There were many more teachers in the FFT cohort who had advanced degrees than in the city at large (80% vs. 40%).
- The majority of Fellows were high school teachers (83%), while teachers in the city were more heavily distributed at the elementary level (51%).

- Two-thirds of the Fellows were relatively new to the profession, whereas just 30% of citywide teachers had between one and three years of experience.
- From the limited data available, it appeared that the ethnic make up of the FFT Fellows was predominantly Caucasian; by contrast, 61% of New York City teachers were Caucasian, 21% African-American, 14% Hispanic, and 5% Asian.

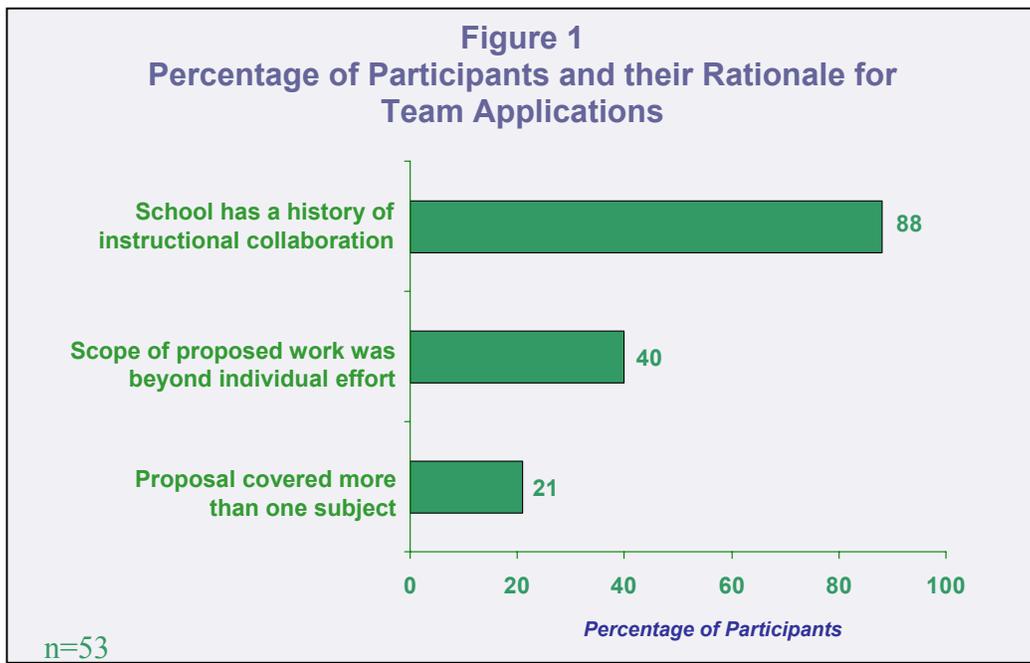
There were differences in the relationship that participants' schools had with the NVPS/FFT organizations.

- More than half the respondents (59%) came from schools that had previous FFT Fellows, while 30% came from schools in which they were the first FFT Fellows.
- The majority of Fellows (79%) were teachers were teachers under the umbrella of New Visions for Public Schools. Of these fellows, 70% taught in New Visions schools and 9% taught in New Century High Schools. Others were from Expeditionary Learning Programs (11%), Champions of Active Learning Grant Schools (2%) and host schools to New Century High Schools (2%).

Most Fellows submitted an individual proposal for their learning experience.

- Almost three-fourths of the respondents (74%) proposed to conduct a summer Fellowship individually; the remainder (26%) partnered with a colleague in submitting a team application.

Team applicants were influenced by their school's history of instructional collaboration (Figure 1).



- Fellows largely attributed their team proposals to the instructional climate of their schools (88%)—team approach to lesson planning, co-teaching experiences, content area vertical teams, etc.
- A smaller proportion reported that they chose a team project because of the scope of proposed work (40%) and the interdisciplinary nature of their project (21%).

How was the recruitment and application process perceived?

(a) Perceptions of the Selection Committee

MAGI conducted a focus group interview with a sample of four selection committee members to ascertain their perceptions of the selection process. Their educational and professional backgrounds were diverse; however, each felt prepared for the task of reviewing the applicant proposals. Of the four focus group participants, three were external to the organization. In terms of experience, two claimed to have served as readers in past years. The following themes emerged in the content analysis of the data.

The orientation process was adequate.

- The selection committee was given clear and detailed written guidelines by the staff. “They were very helpful...the guidelines have steadily improved from year to year,” remarked a participant.

The review process was conducted in a systematic, thorough, and judicious manner.

- There was adequate time for independent reading and scoring of the applications. The scoring rubric had seen much improvement this year: it showed flexibility without compromising accuracy of response. There were sufficient opportunities to seek and get clarification at all stages of the review. “New Visions staff were readily available.” Added this year, was an efficient system for flagging and resolving inter-rater scoring discrepancies.

There was a wide range in the quality of proposals.

- Participants noted that the 2006 cluster of proposals was marked by a wide disparity in caliber. In their words, “There were very high quality ones, and also those of very low quality...not much in the way of middle-ground.” Many were creative and compelling projects but several did not “sell well”—possibly an issue of framing good ideas in a marketable fashion. Even so, there was a substantial increase in the volume and strength of the proposals over two years.

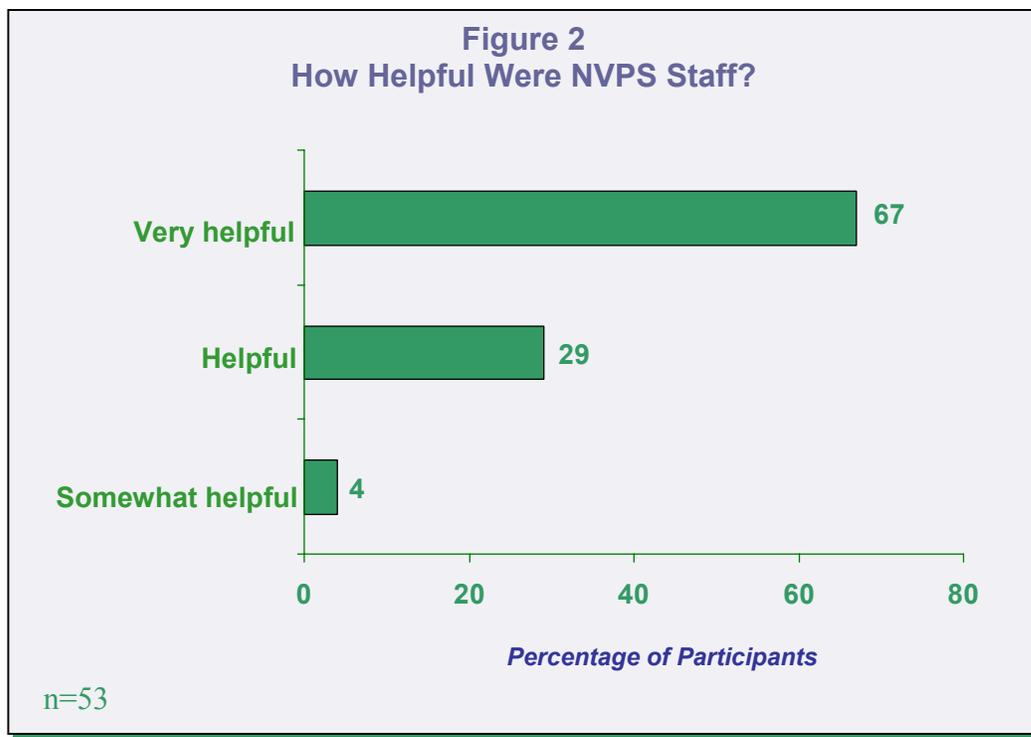
Information on the context for the proposal would have been helpful to reviewers.

- Selection committee members suggested that NVPS supply readers with some background information on the applicant—such as the grade level of instruction—to better assist them in gauging the merit of the projects.

(b) Perceptions of the FFT Fellows

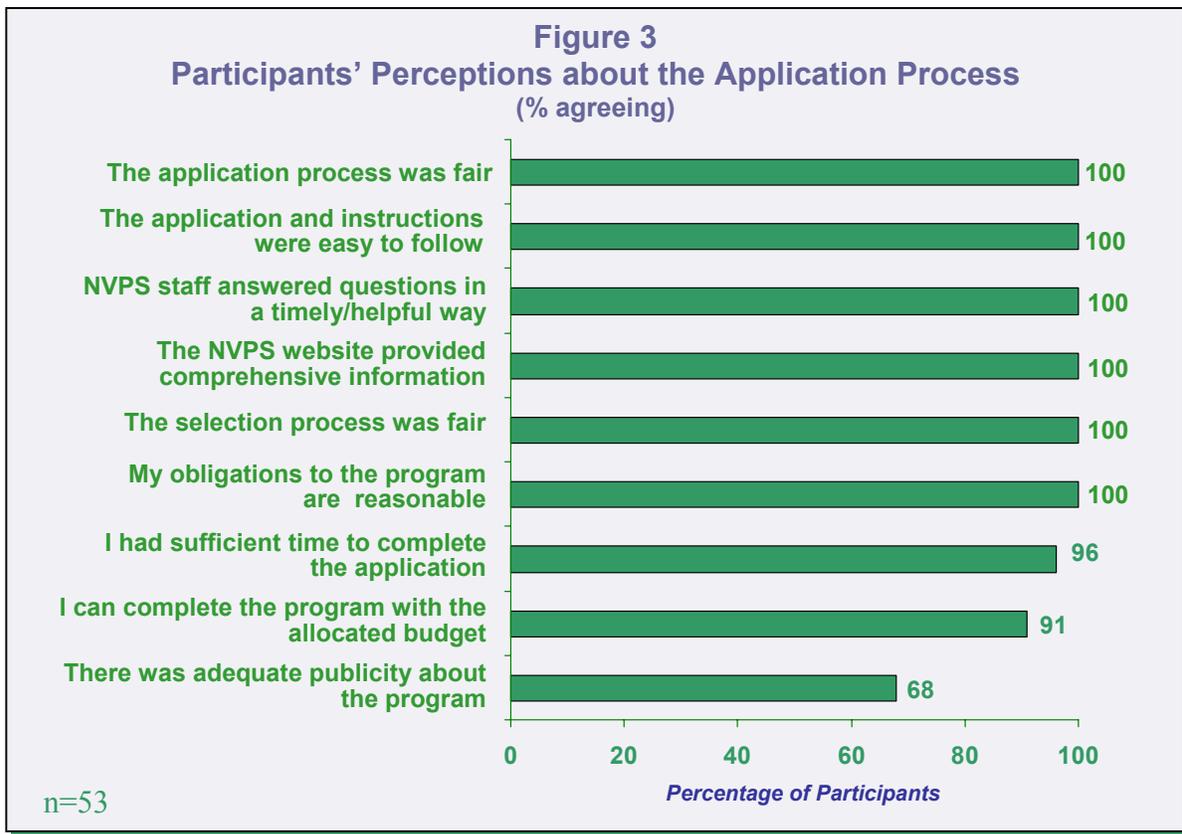
Fellows reported that they first learned about the FFT Fellowship through a variety of channels. Some were encouraged to apply by former recipients (32%) and their building principal (26%). Others read about the Fellowship in a brochure (15%) and a few learned about it from the website (6%).

Most Fellows were satisfied with the assistance they received from the NVPS staff (Figure 2).



- Two-thirds (67%) of the group found the NVPS staff to be very helpful.

Fellows gave high marks to the FFT application process (Figure 3).



- All participants concurred that the application and selection processes were fair and equitable.
- They agreed that they received adequate information and that instructions for completing the application were clear.
- Over 90% felt that they were given sufficient resources (time and money) to complete their project.
- About two-thirds (68%) of them reported that the program was adequately marketed.

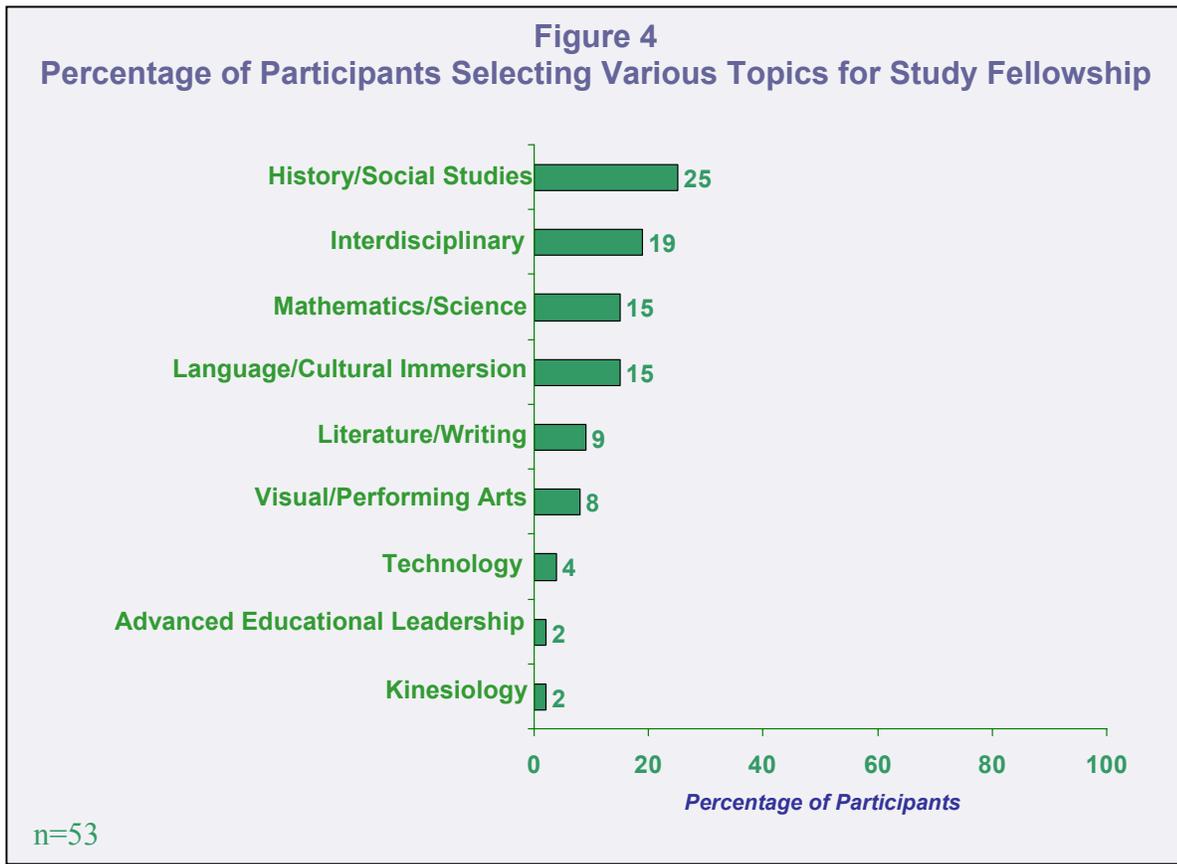
In focus group discussions, Fellows strongly agreed that the program was well organized and managed. A few of the participants suggested that the FFT Fellowship could be publicized more widely, so that a greater (ethnic) diversity in the cohort of Fellows could be achieved.

**“This was a very well-run and organized program.
What a privilege to be involved!”**

FFT Participant

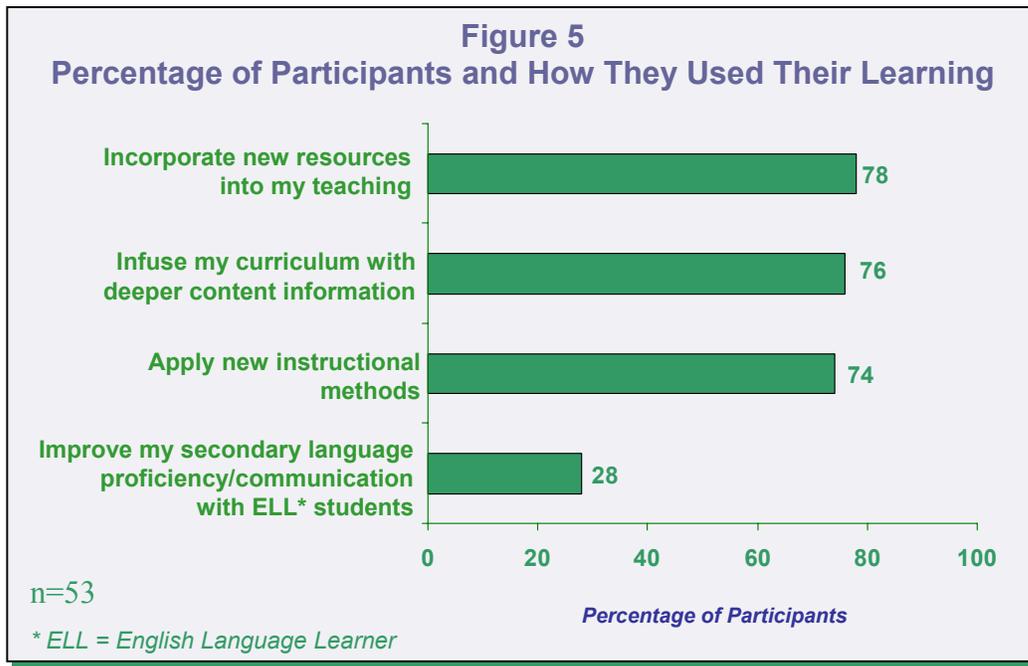
In what content areas did Fellows pursue their learning and to what extent did they apply it?

Participants selected a wide range of topics for study (Figure 4).



- Fully one quarter of participants based their projects around topics in history and social studies.
- Interdisciplinary projects were conducted by 19% of Fellows.
- Mathematics/science projects and language/cultural immersion projects each constituted 15% of the learning experiences conducted by participants.
- Less than 10% of Fellows elected to conduct Fellowships on the following topics: literature/writing, visual/performing arts, technology, advanced educational leadership, and kinesiology.

The majority of Fellows had intended to use their learning to improve their professional skills (Figure 5).

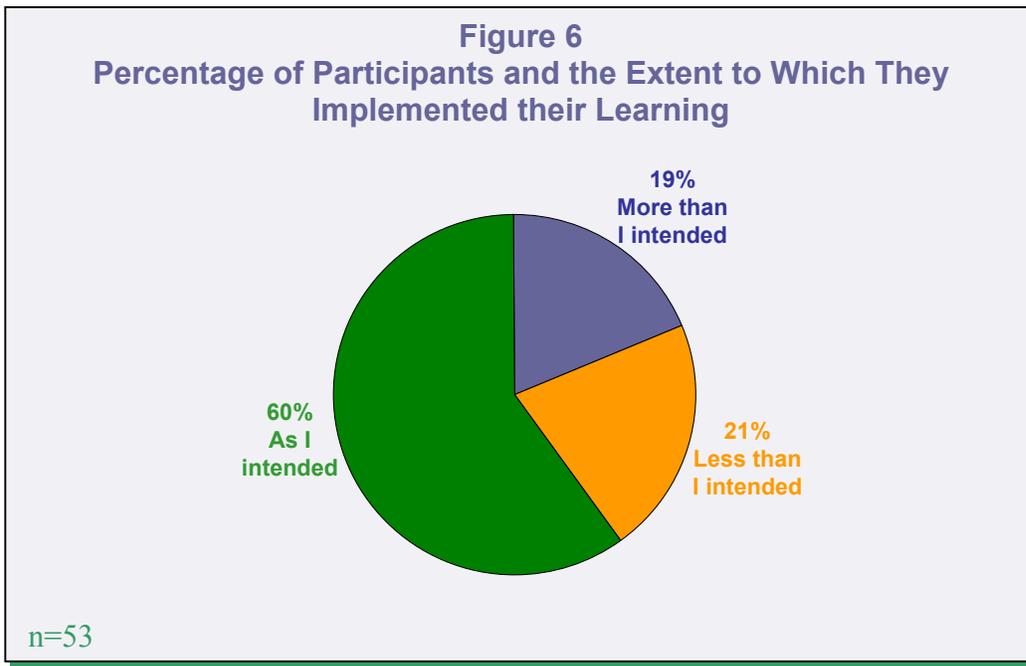


- Over 70% of respondents reported that they had planned to use their summer learning experiences to enhance their teaching competence—through the use of new resources, new content, and new teaching methods.
- A smaller proportion of them planned to use the Fellowship to gain second language proficiency so they could communicate more fully with English language learners and their parents (28%).

“My students will read “Night” while studying the Holocaust & watch the documentary we made. They’ll also see images of museums & other forms of telling history. We’ll ‘problematize’ how history is told/preserved & the complications/implications attached. Students will then become historians and determine how to document history.”

FFT Participant

By Fall 2006, most participants incorporated their summer learning into their teaching repertoires, some even more than intended (Figure 6).



- Almost 80% of Fellows claimed that upon returning to their classes in Fall, they put their learning into instructional practice. Moreover, 19% of them reported that they were applying their learning more than they had intended.
- The remaining 21% said that at the time of survey administration, they had not fully incorporated their summer learning into classroom practice.

“I was changed from Global history to U.S. history, so I will share the [learning experience] with other teachers and use my advisory.”

FFT Participant

Among the chief reasons given for “less-than-intended” implementation were that (a) there had been insufficient time to craft lessons using their summer learning, and (b) several Fellows had new teaching assignments, necessitating alternate/delayed approaches to implementation. In the main, four areas of future use were noted:

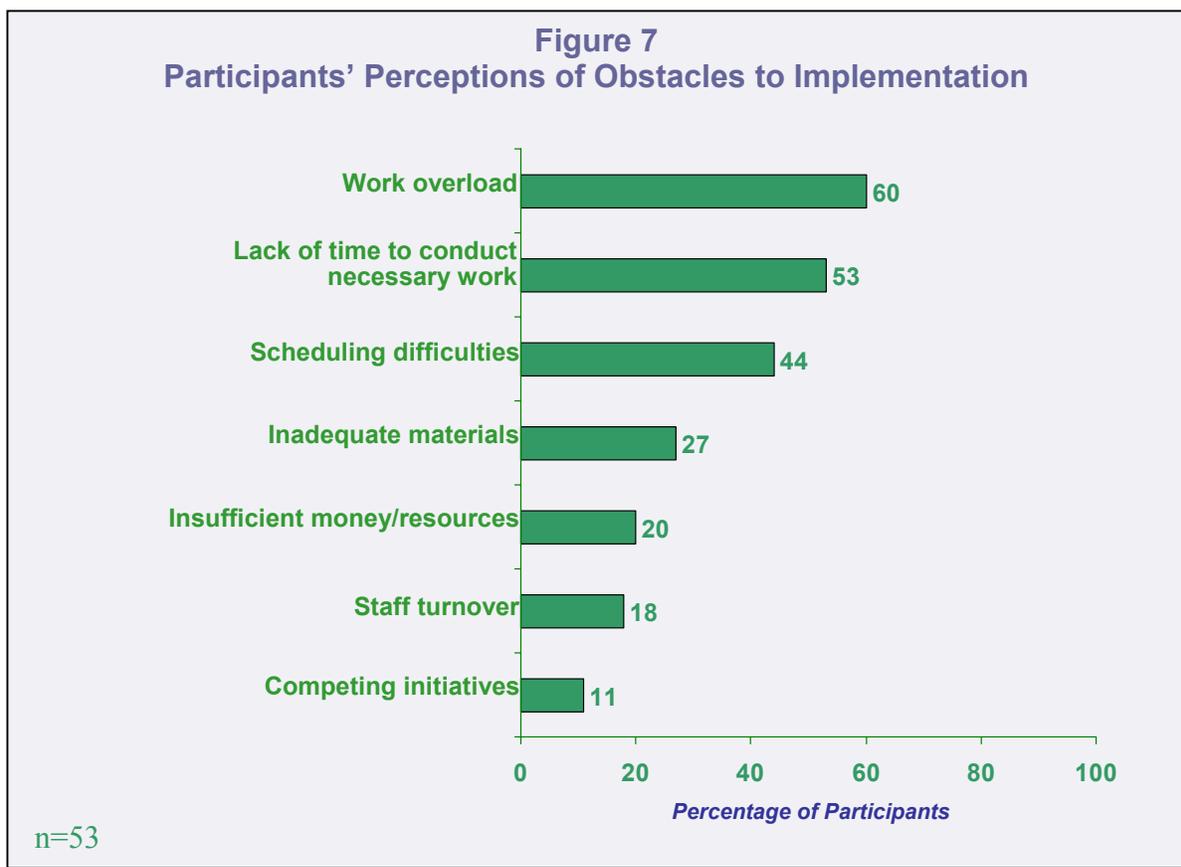
1. *Curriculum design*- creating new courses at grade level and across grade levels (e.g., a unit on printmaking for all grades).
2. *Curriculum enhancement*- embedding new content and authentic material into existing courses.

3. *Application of new instructional methods*- implementing interdisciplinary approaches, using case studies as communication tools, and using technology (e.g., video) to document interviews.
4. *Instructional leadership*- providing professional development for teachers and colleagues in grade level/multi-grade teams.

“I’ve only showed my presentation/journal to my Science team because they were the ones most interested. I’d like to develop cross-curricular materials with humanities and math teachers.”

FFT Participant

There were several obstacles to implementation, chief among which were work overload, insufficient time, and scheduling difficulties (Figure 7).

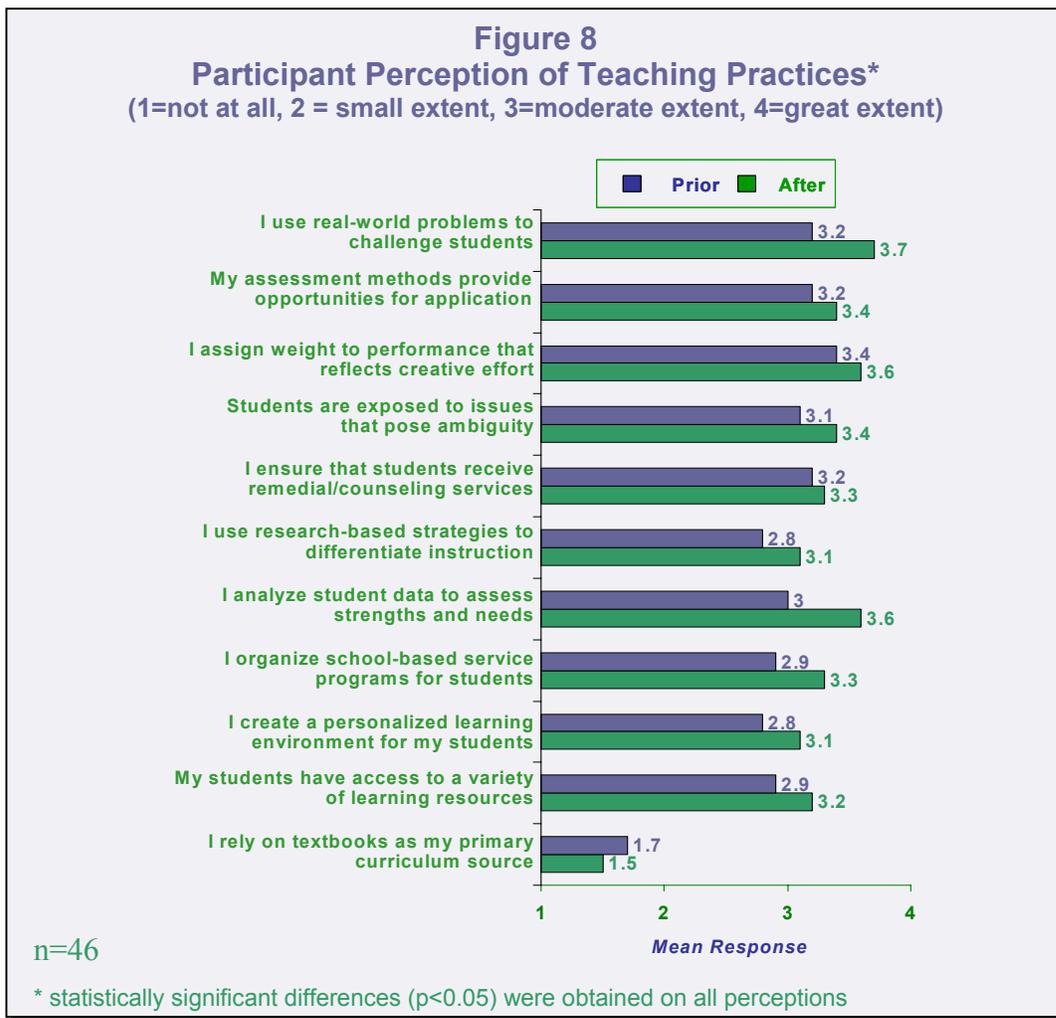


- For 60% of Fellows, work overload was the primary impediment to implementing their learning experience.
- In a similar vein, about half the respondents (53%) felt that there was insufficient time to carry out their learning, while 44% had problems incorporating the new material into their teaching schedule.

What impact did the Summer Fellowship have on participants—their teaching practices, perceptions of their profession, and benefits?

In order to assess whether the FFT experience influenced teachers' perceptions of their teaching practices, professional roles and attitudes, we compared two sets of responses on the post-survey: a retrospective pre-response and the post-response. Our rationale for choosing this approach over a comparison of the pre- and post-survey responses was based on a body of research that shows the retrospective pre-response to be a more robust pre-assessment than the traditional pre-survey (Griner Hill & Betz, 2005; Nimon & Allen, 2006; Pratt, Mcguigan & Katzev, 2000)².

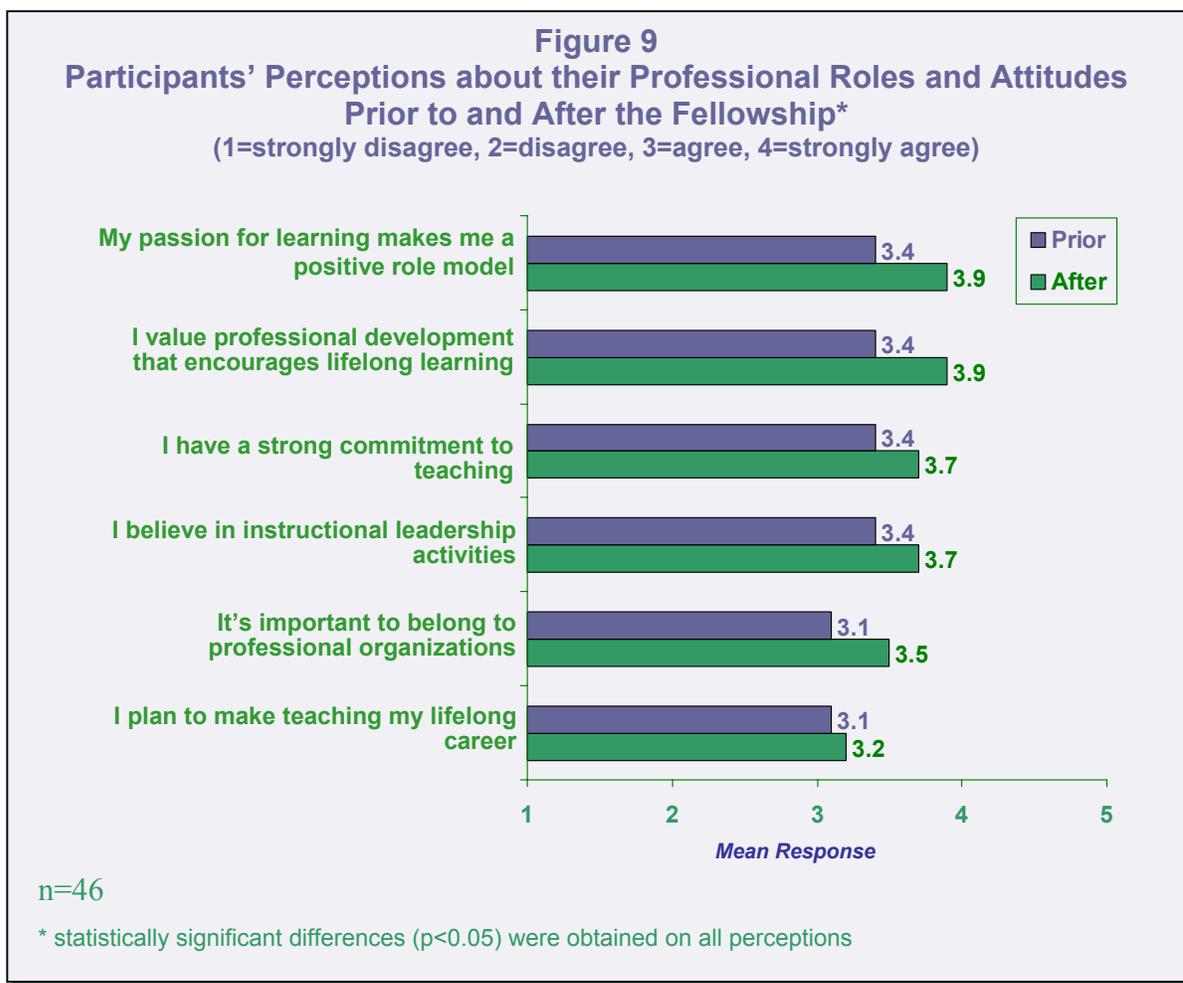
Fellows reported significant gains in teaching practices as a result of the Summer Fellowship (Figure 8).



² The studies cited demonstrated that respondents typically overestimate their knowledge and behavior prior to exposure to the “treatment.” By contrast, when asked to reflect on their prior knowledge after the treatment, their responses are more conservative. Our results supported this theory. There were little to no differences between the mean pre-survey responses and the mean post-survey responses.

- Respondents claimed significantly greater use of authentic and student-centered instructional methods, curricula and materials, and student support strategies after they had experienced the Fellowship.
- On one practice, there was a reverse trend: Fellows relied significantly less on textbooks as a primary curriculum source after the Fellowship than before, lending further support to the overall finding that the Fellowship had improved teachers' perception of their competence.

Participants held significantly more positive attitudes towards the teaching profession after the Summer Fellowship (Figure 9).



Fellows more strongly agreed that they espoused these professional attitudes and roles after they had completed the summer experience than they had prior to the experience—a difference that was statistically significant. Specifically, they more strongly agreed that

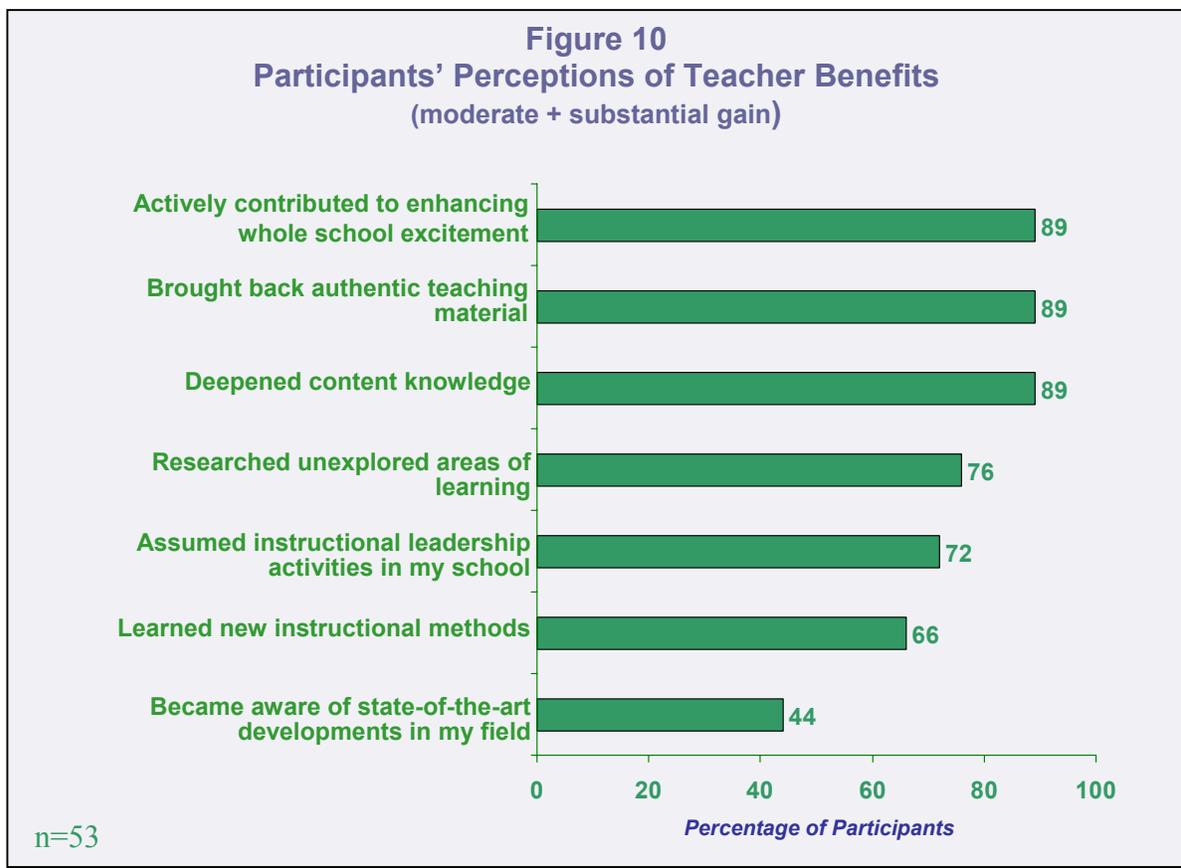
- it was important to participate in school wide leadership activities,
- they valued lifelong learning,

- they had passion and excitement for learning, and
- they planned to have a long-term teaching career.

“It’s not that often that people are jealous of you as a teacher.”

FFT Participant

Fellows gained substantial professional benefits from the FFT experience (Figure 10).



- The largest proportion of Fellows reported that the experience afforded them the opportunity to increase knowledge of their subject areas, to add to their resource material, and to share their enthusiasm for learning with their school communities (89%).
- According to 72% of respondents, the FFT experience gave them the confidence to assume instructional leadership roles in their school.

- To a lesser extent (44%), the Fellowship exposed teachers to current developments in their field.

These perceptions were supported by focus group interview data.

- *Fellows felt acknowledged as professionals.* “We feel respected as teachers and want to live up to the high expectations that this experience instilled in us,” they commented.
- *Fellows learned from a new perspective.* For example, on major world issues, like apartheid, race and identity, and world imperialism, participants were able to enrich their understanding by learning another point of view. “It was humbling as an American to listen to a victim of South African apartheid.”
- *The experience endorsed a self-image as a lifelong learner.* Fellows attested that the FFT experience allowed them to “model for students that we too are learners.”
- *It was an opportunity to be creative.* Many valued the open-ended nature of the Fellowship that allowed them to “pull all stops” in crafting unique and imaginative learning experiences.

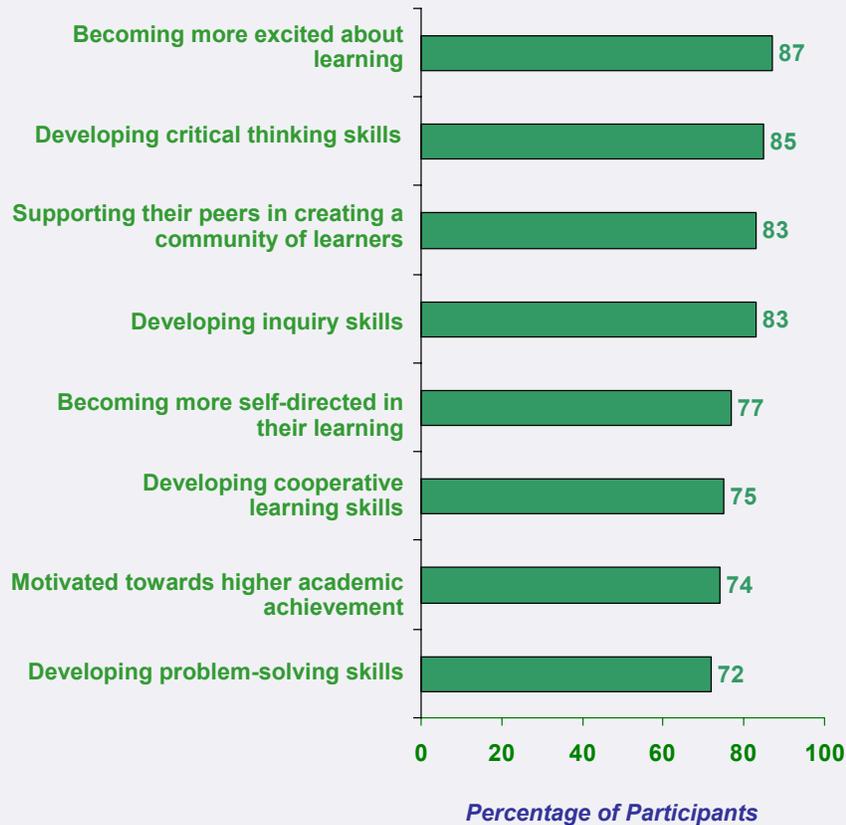
“It is great. I think this really influences us and the kids. I am always talking about my trips and kids get excited to explore, especially my Spanish kids who have never traveled except from their native countries to the USA.”

FFT Participant

What impact did the program have on participants’ perceptions of student benefits?

As a result of Fellows’ participation in the FFT experience, they perceived many positive learning skills and behaviors among their students (Figure 11, on the following page).

Figure 11
Percentage of Participants Who Perceived Student Benefits
(moderate + great extent)



n=53

- Over 80% of respondents felt that students shared a greater excitement for learning with their classmates.
- A similar proportion attested that students were developing critical thinking skills.
- Over three quarters reported that students displayed more self-directed learning.
- Finally, two-thirds claimed that students were developing perseverance skills.

It was too early in the academic year to report more specific student benefits. Even so, participants in focus group interviews were in agreement that their FFT experience helped in engaging students more fully in their education. As commented by a participant, “The benefits with students are hard to measure (new group of kids, other factors in their learning & lives). Also, I’ve not taught the unit on Cambodia yet, so I can’t state precisely the benefits. They are, however, excited to learn about it knowing that I’ve been there.”

Case Studies

The following case studies enabled us to “put a face” on the project thereby enhancing the overall validity and reliability of our findings. Below, we describe Fellows’ expectations, their summer experience, and the impact of the professional development on their knowledge and practice, student benefits, challenges to implementation, and their suggestions for program improvement.

1. Teacher A

Background and Expectations

Currently a high school mathematics teacher, **A** came to the FFT program with five years of teaching experience. She was encouraged to apply for a Fellowship by the fact that her school had a history of teachers who had successful FFT experiences. She noticed that many of her students struggled with concepts in Algebra, Geometry and Pre-Calculus, an observation that she attributed to gaps in their middle school education. Teaming with a colleague, she proposed to study the teaching and learning of mathematics in China and the Far East—countries that are renowned for superior student achievement in mathematics. “What makes them more successful?” she pondered. She also pointed out that many of her students born in the U.S. were of Asian origin. “Perhaps we’ll discover approaches to teaching that are ‘more natural’ and supported by their parents.” Specifically, **A** hoped to learn techniques that give students a firm foundation in their understanding of basic algebra skills (e.g. solving for an unknown quantity, and knowing why certain procedures work).

The Fellowship Experience

A and her colleague visited several schools in Hong Kong and China over the study period. They discovered major differences between the Chinese and U.S. school systems. For example, “there were many more subjects (about 15) and the number of weekly classes varied from subject to subject.” The instructors were given more autonomy in decisions regarding curricula and material selection and students were held much more accountable for their learning. Rigor was clearly apparent. Entry into high school was based on a competitive exam. Failure to pass the exam resulted in students not being able to complete their education. Mathematics instruction emphasized a great deal of memorization and homework completion. Students were tested orally each day and failure to answer correctly resulted in a loss of grade points.

Upon examining student workbooks and notebooks, it was clear to **A** that “homework was designed to carve procedures” in students’ repertoire of mathematics skills. Their team had an interesting finding. They tested Chinese students on mathematics problems: all were able to solve them correctly but not always able to explain why the methods worked. “When I asked a student how she knew her solution was correct, she said, “Because I had done a million of these and I know how to do it.””

They noticed several cultural differences in the school environment. Student work was not posted on bulletin boards, unless the work was exemplary. Schools were decorated with pictures of social life and student awards. Even though teachers did not always have the fluency to carry out a conversation with the team, **A**'s colleague was fluent in Cantonese and provided translation services.

As anticipated, the team found it difficult to locate schools that were open during the summer. "We used our personal connections to reach teachers. We also looked up schools and called in to see if there was anyone available who also spoke English and could tell us about their teaching experience," **A** reported. Another challenge was a higher than expected level of suspicion. In her words, "Teachers in China don't seem all that open to sharing information and at times we felt that our interviewees were a little concerned about what pieces of information to share."

Impact on Knowledge and Teaching

What stands out for the team as particularly insightful about mathematics education in China is the system's belief in a universal and correct approach to teaching mathematics. "They emphasize using the right method and right material and support it with a high level of technology, rather than develop new methods." New books appeared to flood the educational market but these advocated essentially the same traditional method. **A** mused, "The drill and kill method may seem boring to us, but the Chinese do produce results—students who have a firm foundation in mathematical skills and who are able to grapple with complex problems." Before leaving their host countries, they collected many books and materials for use in their school.

Upon returning to their classes in the Fall, **A** and her colleague experimented with ways to combine eastern methods with what they already know to be successful at their high school. "We give homework assignments twice a week and include a lot of drills in it." They felt this contributed to increasing student confidence. They also ran an after-school club into which they incorporated many of these exercises to reinforce student understanding of basic mathematical concepts.

Impact on Students

There were initial difficulties in getting students to shift their learning methods. However, once students experienced success, they were less resistant. Also, **A** saw that some students were able to explain mathematical procedures—a skill that is often slow to evolve.

Impact on School

A planned to organize the learning experience into a journal to share with other staff members. It will consist of records of the interviews she conducted in China and the major themes that emerged—such as the motivational and reinforcing factors and instructional approaches to teaching specific concepts. Also, she planned to develop a pre- and post-survey for students to be given at the beginning and end of the school year, the results of

which will be disseminated to other teachers in her school. She and her colleague have presented their major learning at school-wide staff meetings and with the mathematics department.

Suggestions for Improvement

A recommended that program organizers create opportunities for FFT Fellows to interact with past Fellows—to hear about their experiences and their areas of study.

2. Teacher B

Background and Expectations

Teacher **B** was looking to re-energize her teaching approach to high school English. Specifically, she wanted to explore new ways of teaching writing. She was encouraged to apply by her principal and especially her colleagues who had successful FFT Fellowships in the past. She noticed that many of her 9th graders had difficulty getting started in writing assignments. Given a highly personalized approach to teaching that she was accustomed to using, her proposal – prompted by an avocation in photography – was to take photographs in Italy that were of historical significance. These icons would be used in an interdisciplinary curriculum as writing/thinking prompts for students. “The idea is use visual images to spark student interest in important historical periods in world history. For example, I can use them when I teach about Dante’s ‘Inferno’ and the history teacher can incorporate these images in introducing students to world history.”

The Fellowship Experience

B traveled to Rome, Palermo, Pompeii, Florence, Pisa, and Venice where she immersed herself in taking photographs of both cultural and historical significance. “I observed and captured ancient historical artifacts on film—those that America lacks. The trip definitely helped me prepare for the school year and refine my skills in photography,” she related. Particularly useful to her experience was being on hand to record images that exemplified cultural differences between western countries. “I was lucky enough to come across a wedding at one of the churches I visited and observe how Italian custom is different from American custom.” **B** hoped to use these images as prompts for students to think about cultures other than their own.



Impact on Knowledge and Teaching

Upon returning to her classes in Fall, **B** reported that there had been some shifts in teaching assignments; as a result, she had not had a chance to incorporate these resources into her own classes. However, she had shared her photographs with another colleague who taught poetry.

B hopes to use her resources in future high school English classes and to make them available to the art and history teachers in her building.



Impact on Students

It was not possible at the time of the post-interview to determine how **B**'s summer learning had influenced her students for the reasons cited above.

Suggestions for Improvement

If she had a chance to participate in the FFT program again, **B** would scale down the scope of her proposal and focus on a specific plan for use in her class and not extend it to her entire school as “circumstances always change when we get back.” She also felt program requirements should be more circumscribed. “As it stands,” she said, “we’re not held accountable enough. The final product can be anything we want.” Finally, she would have appreciated more contact between FFT staff and Fellows during the Fellowship year, by way of support and technical assistance.

In summary, both teachers were affected in a positive manner by the experience. They gained insights relative to their area of inquiry, although there were differences in the scope of each proposal. Both gathered new and authentic material intended for incorporation into their teaching assignments. As the experience unfolded, they adjusted some of their initial expectations, based on what was available to them. Even so, the “unrestricted” professional development experience resulted in personal and professional growth of a quality that is rare in the educational mainstream.

What applicant characteristics were associated with improved classroom practice and how may this inform the application process?

We also wanted to know if there was a relationship between certain applicant features and perceived outcomes. Specifically, did teachers’ degree status, years of experience, certification pathway and certification status, and the nature of the FFT application (individual or team) have an impact on how they perceived their classroom practice and student outcomes?

Teacher characteristics did not influence perceived outcomes.

- There were no significant differences on perceived classroom practice or student outcomes between teachers who differed on degree status (bachelor's or master's), years of experience, certification pathway (traditional or alternate), or certification status (conditional, provisional, or permanent).

There were no differences between individual and team FFT applicants on perceived classroom practices or student outcomes.

- Fellows who submitted individual and team proposals did not significantly differ from each other on their perception of classroom practices, professional roles and attitudes, or student outcomes.

What recommendations can be made for improving the process and management of the New York City FFT program?

Participants gave several suggestions on how to improve the FFT Fellowship program in future years—those that may inform the outreach, orientation, and management of the program.

1. *Consider recruiting from a broader pool of applicants.*

The current group was predominantly Caucasian with a small minority of Asian teachers. Respondents felt that they could have benefited from a more ethnically diverse cohort of Fellows, with whom they could mutually learn about different cultural orientations and how these may influence instructional approaches. Also, they felt that the program could benefit many more teachers.

“Making teachers aware of this program is crucial because it is invaluable to teachers; rejuvenating and inspiring experiences that benefit not just the teachers but the entire learning community.”

FFT Participant

2. *Develop a resource directory.*

Fellows generally concurred that a directory of relevant information should be compiled for future cohorts of participants. The resource book could include a list of past Fellows and their contact information, translation services in foreign countries, and links to relevant websites.

“I am not sure I would have used it...had it been given to me, but I would love to share my contacts (from the 3 countries I visited) with any future travelers to those countries.”

FFT Participant

3. *Assemble a collection of past proposals.*

Several respondents would have liked access to past (successful) proposals. This could have shortened the “learning curve” in how to write a winning proposal.

4. *Improve the online application.*

Participants noticed that the online technology did not enable them to return to previous sections of their proposal. Glitches such as these could be easily corrected.

5. *Demand more accountability from Fellows.*

Almost all Fellows recommended that the program develop greater measures of accountability from participants. They felt that the program administrators should monitor their progress during the Fellowship, which would also provide an opportunity for Fellows to ask for technical assistance. More importantly, NVPS and FFT should establish clearer/more specific expectations for the final product. As one commented, “More specific post-Fellowship goals and aims would aid the FFT in obtaining the materials and curricula this Fellowship is intended to collect.”

“There should be more support meetings & how to implement in the classroom sooner. The final cumulative reflection is very vague—basically anything you want. There should be more stringent requirements.”

FFT Participant

Summary & Conclusions

1. *The New York City FFT summer learning program was highly regarded.*

Both selection committee members and Fellows concurred that the program was well conceived and organized. Clear, fair, and efficient procedures were established for the application and selection phases of the program, and NVPS staff was readily available for assistance. Fellows valued the autonomous approach to professional development—one that broke rank with conventional teacher in-service programs. It allowed them to customize their learning experiences around topics and content areas most pertinent to their professional growth.

2. *Most FFT Fellows implemented their summer learning.*

Upon returning to their classes in Fall 2006, the majority of Fellows put their learning to practice. What was more, some implemented their experiences beyond the extent they had originally anticipated. About a fifth of the FFT cohort reported that they had not implemented their learning yet, largely because of shifts in teaching assignments and insufficient time at the start of the school year. Nonetheless, they planned to conduct lessons around their summer Fellowship in the course of the year—either individually or through collaborative approaches.

3. *Lack of time was the chief impediment to classroom implementation.*

All Fellows were committed to school programs where their obligations went beyond classroom instruction: they were involved in after-school tutoring programs, school-wide instructional committee tasks, and extra-curricular activities for students. As a result, it was a challenge to find time in their daily schedule to embed their new learning experiences. Still, many designed instructional approaches (e.g., collaborative teaching and multi-grade instruction) that permitted the incorporation of the new material.

4. *Fellows perceived that they had improved their teaching practices as a result of the FFT experience.*

Participants reported significant gains in their use of authentic, student-centered teaching strategies, primary source material, and student support practices. They claimed to use research-based approaches to addressing student diversity, and methods that challenged students to examine real-world problems—to a significantly greater extent after the Fellowship than before. Additionally, they relied less on textbooks as a primary curriculum source, since most of them had acquired a variety of learning resources through the experience. All in all, the FFT experience appeared to change how teachers practiced their craft.

5. *The FFT experience altered the attitudes that participants held about their profession.*

Participants held significantly more positive attitudes towards their profession after the summer learning experience than before. They more strongly valued lifelong learning, school-wide leadership activities, and felt more certain that teaching was a long-term career.

“Thank you...this was a life changing experience for both me, and my students.”

FFT Participant

6. *Participants reported the emergence of positive student skills and behaviors.*

According to the Fellows, their students had begun to show greater excitement for learning, which they attributed to the passion and energy that they as teachers manifested in their instruction. They noticed that their students were more self-directed in their learning and that perseverance skills were evident.

7. *Several recommendations were made for improving the FFT program.*

Fellows suggested that the organizers maintain greater contact with them through all phases of the experience, which would give them an opportunity to seek technical assistance as issues and problems arose. A resource directory of past Fellows, translation services abroad, and a collection of successful (past) proposals should be compiled. Finally, Fellows suggested that the program establish more stringent measures of accountability.

In closing, our evaluation of the New York City NVPS/FFT Fellowship produced several noteworthy results. Nonetheless, these findings should be interpreted with caution. The duration of the evaluation cycle was brief—less than 12 months. In such a short time frame, we cannot ascertain the stability of the perceived outcomes. At best, we can say that the pre/post gains, while promising, have yet to stand the test of time. Secondly, since the host schools were all part of a broader urban school reform initiative, it is difficult to attribute perceived changes in teaching practice and attitudes, as well as perceived student benefits, solely to the FFT Fellowship. While something positive was afoot for teachers who had the FFT experience, we would need to conduct a more comprehensive and rigorous study to determine the extent of that influence.

Directions for Future Research

1. Conduct a longitudinal study of the FFT experience over a period of years. Such an undertaking should compare the different NYC cohorts of Fellows who have participated in the summer experience. In addition, the case studies should follow participants through (at least) a full academic year. Such an evaluation would yield useful information about the long-term effects of the Fellowship, its impact on implementation, instructional leadership and the production of curriculum and staff training materials.
2. Conduct a nationwide evaluation of FFT programs. Identify common threads and differences between them in terms of outreach, management, implementation, and impact.

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