

LESSONS FROM ALBANIA: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THAT TRANSFORMS EDUCATORS, SCHOOLS, AND COMMUNITIES

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Abstract – *Programs of staff development for in-service teachers often focus on the introduction of specific skills and technologies. Seldom do staff development programs take on more broad goals of professional and personal growth. In this article the authors describe one program, the Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking project, a literacy-based project developed and implemented by the International Reading Association. The project began as a training program with rather modest goals of instructional skills development, but resulted in a surprising number of unexpected outcomes. These outcomes clearly distinguished this program as a professional rather than a technical development activity. The project, a three-year training of trainers model, introduced innovative literacy-based techniques in Albania (and 29 other countries in Europe and Asia) from 1997-2001. The authors, both members of the International Reading Association, participated in the project's implementation and dissemination in Albania. In this article, after reviewing the project, the authors summarize their investigation of the project's impact on individual participants through data collected in survey and case study. In doing so, they differentiate between technical and professional development and offer suggestions, based on this study, regarding how other in-service programs might be shaped to lead to opportunities for in-service teachers to truly develop as individuals and professional educators.*

‘At the beginning I was thinking that only little things had changed in me.
I was provided with some new techniques,
I was feeling comfortable during my classes,
I was feeling certain when teaching and like that.
But later I noticed that the change was big.’
Zhuljeta, History Teacher, Elbasan,

Introduction

Professional development is often initiated for the purpose of improving *students'* performance, expanding *students'* self-concepts, or increasing *students'* motivation and positive behavior. As participant-observers for four years in the International Reading Association's professional learning program *Reading and*

Writing for Critical Thinking (RWCT), we believe professional learning programs can have even more powerful and long-lasting implications for the lives of *educators* and the *school communities* in which they work.

The increased capacity in human resources and a refreshing sense of professionalism can be, in itself, a significant outcome. But not all so-called staff development or in-service training lead to transformative experiences, experiences that dramatically shift the way participants come to understand their students and their students' families, the nature and purpose of schooling, their role in the construction of meaning, and so forth.

What are the characteristics of professional learning programs that transform teachers' ideas about theory and practice? And, what are the ways professional transformations manifest themselves in the classroom and in the school community? In this article, we describe the organization, process, and sample outcomes of the *Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking* project as it was implemented in Albania over a three-year period. We believe professional development programs patterned after this project can be highly effective in transforming practice and practitioners, enhancing and enriching the lives of teachers, their colleagues, and their students. What's more, we believe lessons learned in Albania have application to teachers everywhere.

Professional development: informative or transformative?

Education theorists (e.g. Goodlad, 1994; Sizer, 1992; Soder, 1996) have outlined visions of educational transformation intended to realign traditional models of schooling along more productive values of a democratic society. These include such virtues as active individual participation, respect for individual difference, equal access to high status rewards, moral stewardship, and reciprocating systems of support between individuals and the community.

Educational philosophy can provide a vision of *what* schools might become. It stimulates intellectual discussion about ideal worlds of goals, attitudes, and values. Unfortunately, visionaries may offer little guidance about *how* such transformations might come about in the very real worlds of public schools.

Critical theorists (Apple, 1989; Callahan, 1962; Giroux, 1983; Tierney, 1993) point out barriers to meaningful educational transformation include well-entrenched traditions of class, ethnicity, and gender. Removed from the central equations of power, educators often feel powerless to effect even modest changes in their own classrooms. Fewer still appear able to promote change across the school communities in which they work. Why might this be so?

Teachers and administrators often adopt passive roles in their approach to their work, and limited sense of their own selves and efficacy. Like factory workers in

a production-oriented educational system, educators often view their work as a process of applying appropriate techniques to produce skilled learners. In such environments staff development programs often aim to enhance the technical skills of teachers, but may do so without substantively affecting their perspectives, status, or access to power (Graves, 1983; Routman, 2000; Shannon, 1989).

We agree educators can and must be change agents in their own schools. They can become leaders in the process of transforming schools into democratic communities. A rich background in theory and research must guide professional development. But we contend that classroom teachers are more likely to embrace change when it is presented in the form of a transformative pedagogy.

The rise of the Professional Development Schools studies (Abdal-Haqq, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 1994; Holmes Group, 1986, etc.) underscore the power and effectiveness of creating school-based learning communities. By changing traditional school staff development into clinical communities of praxis, in-service teachers are encouraged and empowered to develop reflective pedagogy, share expertise, and provide mutual support and assistance. Clearly, the impetus for such clinical activity is derived from real-life issues of best classroom pedagogy and outcomes for children and their families.

DuFour and Eaker (1998) describe six characteristics of schools as professional learning communities. These include: (1) a shared mission, vision, and values; (2) collective inquiry; (3) collaborative teams; (4) action orientation and experimentation; (5) continuous improvement or a constant search for a better way; and (6) a results orientation or the goal of tangible improvement. We contend that these elements were intentionally built into the design of this professional development program. Further, these elements help to distinguish this professional development program apart from traditional models and contributed to its transformative results.

Based on our experiences in the *Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking* project in Albania, we would hypothesize that literacy pedagogy is particularly well-suited to promote professional development and promote transformative outcomes. We base this hypothesis on several key assumptions about instruction in particular and about language in general.

A twentieth century industrial mind-set introduced a division of labor and specialization that carried over to many educational systems. As a result, it is not unusual for teachers even within the same school to have difficulty finding areas of shared purpose, common problems, and strategies. Each subject area is believed to have discrete learning objectives and a corresponding pedagogy, making communication between teachers of literature, mathematics, and science appear unnecessary and unproductive. Similarly, a strong tradition of developmental psychology has helped fracture the school curriculum making discussions

between primary teachers difficult, and between primary and secondary teachers unimaginable.

Literacy skills, however, and the pedagogy associated with such skill development, however can be a powerful perspective to unite these specialized groups. Teachers readily acknowledge the fact that the skills of reading, writing, and discussion are developed and improved from primary through post-secondary education. In a sense a portion of this development includes learning to become literate and at the same time includes learning to use literacy as a tool for learning and interacting. Just as the literacy curriculum and pedagogy cut across (and therefore unite teachers of all grade levels, so too does literacy skill cut across all subject areas.

This notion of literacy across the curriculum is typically referred to as content area literacy. Simply put, content area literacy suggests that literate skill and competence is critical to student success in learning math, science, history, geography, etc. Naturally, all teachers showed interest in any strategy or intervention that made them more effective as teachers and their students more successful as learners.

Further, the idea of content area literacy suggests that each subject area provides a meaningful or functional opportunity to enhance students' competency with literacy. After all, it only seems logical that if we expect students to use reading and writing to think critically, we must give them content to think about. Similarly, enhanced literate skills (reading, writing, discussion, etc) enabled students to use information they were learning (from textbooks, lectures, experiments, and so forth); it also helped them express their own understanding and, not insignificantly, to begin to monitor, reflect upon and evaluate the quality of their own learning (Vacca, 2002).

An innovative approach to literacy instruction and assessment can be a powerful lever to bring about a 'mindset for change' (Fullan, 1993). As we will demonstrate, constructivist literacy pedagogy can significantly affect student learning and performance and shift the way *students* think of themselves as readers and writers. A professional development program with constructivist literacy pedagogy as its focus can dramatically transform the ways *educators* see themselves and their relationship to their colleagues, administrators, parents, and the curriculum.

Similarly, as we were striving to create professional development learning communities within schools, it seemed reasonable that much of the communication traditions (between teacher and student, between teacher and teacher, and between teacher and supervisor) would need to be considerably transformed from the traditional hierarchical patterns of Albanian schools. A language perspective helped first to sensitize participants to the subtle but critical

components of discourse, second to employ specific techniques as alternative discourse strategies, and third, to reflect on the implications of those alternative discourse strategies.

In total, then, we believe a language both a harmonizing and strategic perspective for initiating personal and institutional change. In designing and implementing a professional development program in Albania we assumed that language (albeit well-entrenched by traditions of power, gender, and status) was a fundamental component of change.

Finally, as an expressive behavior, language use (by students, teachers, and administrators) is highly amenable to measurement. As we had in mind a very praxis-oriented, outcomes based approach to our professional development program language use, discourse patterns, even personal grammars such as question-answer routines, the ability to support personal opinions with facts, or the ability to identify bias or authors' purposes were easy to describe and therefore easy to observe. Teachers' lesson plans and students' written works also become valuable artifacts for setting goals, explicit pedagogy, and measuring change.

Technical skills or professional development?

We make a distinction between programs that lead to technical development and programs that are intended to promote professional development. Traditional staff development programs are often limited to the dissemination of technical information (that is, information about new techniques or procedures). The measure of a technical development program is how well participants have received and understood the new information. The effects of such programs can be observed in teachers' behaviors and gains in student performance.

While professional development programs may also introduce new techniques and have the intention of improving teacher and student performance they differ from technical development in important ways. First, they embed opportunities for guided reflection and discussion. Reflection enriches individuals' understanding of their own experiences. Shared reflection promotes observations and analyses that cut across a variety of contexts. Inquiry and discussion help participants generate new, grounded theories about teaching and learning.

Second, professional development presents innovative techniques within a coherent framework. In fact, instructional techniques can be purposefully used to illustrate new instructional frameworks. The acquisition of new frameworks enable educators to make informed decisions, to anticipate outcomes, and to make sense of those outcomes. A coherent pedagogical framework enables decision-making based on knowledge not just experience.

Third, a transformative professional development program includes a social interaction aspect. Such programs promote teachers' abilities to see connections between to other people, places, and times outside their own. These programs enable educators to work collaboratively with other adults.

Fourth, a transformative professional development program addresses issues of self-esteem and self-concept. This includes the ability to see oneself as more competent and thus more valuable. It means the willingness to try new tasks and to form new relationships.

A professional educator must have intellectual skill and moral courage. We submit that a program of professional development organized around these characteristics constitutes a powerful transformative force that supports the development of the skill and courage required for changing lives in schools and communities.

In total, we agree with Goodlad (1994) that the standard for professional development should be the degree to which intervention promotes introspection. Because school is after all a social organization and learning is a social activity, we assume that an effective professional development program should strive not only to transform individuals but the collective community in which they live and work. Ideally, such a transformative program will both enable the individual to examine his or her role in that community and provide the practical tools for maximizing his or her contribution to the overall success of the learning community.

Our study focuses on the *Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking (RWCT)* project as a model professional development program. Our plan is to identify features of the program that promote professional development and to identify ways professional development manifests itself. Our hope is this model and the information we report here will be useful to others who design and evaluate programs of professional development.

Background to the Study

We chose as a case model of a transformative professional development program, the Reading and writing for Critical Thinking (RWCT) project in Albania. It should be pointed out that the program and these results have been replicated in nearly thirty countries in Europe, Asia and Central America.

The program was designed and implemented in the late 1990s to fit the needs of a variety of countries that were in transition following the break up of the Soviet Union. Implementing this project in Albania revealed some unique aspects of that country's historical, political, cultural, and educational contexts.

The former centralized government of Albania held complete control over political, economic, intellectual, and social interaction. Prohibited from travel, even domestic travel was restricted. Most citizens were denied access to Western literature and had limited opportunities to encounter contemporary Western ideas about teaching and learning. As a result, very little real changes occurred in the professional lives of teachers. Thus whilst political change has propelled Albania into contact with the rest of Europe and the international community, after years of cultural isolation, it remains Europe's poorest country (Leach, 1996). Although the isolation that characterizes the Albanian context may seem extreme, it's curious that many teachers in the United States and Western Europe also refer to a sense of isolation in their daily work, as well.

Our interest in this study grew out of our numerous observations of the many people who had participated in the RWCT professional development program experienced and subsequently underwent profound changes in their professional lives. These changes often took the form of new roles and responsibilities.

Confronting a range of traditional barriers—hierarchical structures of power and status, ethnic and gender bias, restrictive or poorly developed infrastructures—RWCT participants used literacy issues to enhance their access to structures of authority and autonomy. The study was initiated by a single question: Why was this program so effective in transforming participants' professional development?

Our presentation here consists of (1) an overview of the educational context in Albania, (2) a brief history of the program's implementation, dissemination and institutionalization in Albania, and (3) data we collected from Albania educators who participated in this professional development program.

The educational context of Albania

Albania is a Mediterranean country of early culture and civilization, but educational development remained stunted, largely due to the invasion of the Turkish Empire, which led to an occupation that lasted for about five centuries. The first school in the Albanian language was only set up in 1887, in the district of Korça. Teacher education too is quite a recent development in Albania, compared with trends in other Western European countries. The first school of teacher training was set up in Elbasan in 1909, and was called *Shkolla Normale* (Normal School)—a secondary level institution.

In 1948, a 2-year Pedagogical Institute started functioning in Tirana. Nine years later, the University of Tirana was established, marking the beginning of university level teacher education. Higher Pedagogical Institutes responsible for

training elementary school teachers were set up in Shkoder, Elbasan and Gjirokaster. In 1982, a new branch of teachers' training for the lower primary school teachers was set up at these institutions. In 1992, these institutions were converted into Universities.

After the Second World War up to the collapse of the communist dictatorship, Albanian teachers and educators were among the most discriminated members of the intelligentsia. Party totalitarianism imposed a rigid and authoritarian pedagogy. From the 1970's up to the collapse of the dictatorship in Albania in 1991, no published material on philosophy, psychology, sociology, civics, didactics or literature was allowed to enter Albania from abroad. The same was true for the natural sciences, with books and magazines becoming very scarce given the fear of penetration by foreign ideology.

The structure of the education system in the Republic of Albania is as follows. The pre-university system is divided into two educational levels: the compulsory 8-year education (grades 1-4: one teacher for all classes, grades 5-8: different teachers for different subjects) and the secondary education that has two subdivisions general secondary education and vocational education.

During the past decade Albania has been involved in the democratic change processes. These attempts to change the general educational situation were mostly isolated and non-systematic efforts. They were typically not harmonized with other education links and levels, and generally did not bring significant change in the system. What has so far been called an educational reform, was an *ad hoc* reform.

Efforts have been made to modernize teaching methodologies and democratize the teaching-learning process by giving priority to both independent and group work and diminishing the reliance on lecture-recitation models. The effectiveness of such efforts left much to be desired. They were generally divorced from the curricula and textbooks, key instruments built on and reflecting different didactic principles than the new methods. The incongruities and discrepancies between the two are numerous. Teachers were often left in the middle.

In 1992, a national teacher training scheme was put in place, which worked through a system of *formators* (teacher advisers). The scheme became national with around 1000 *formators*, who were supposed to be the best teachers (not always the case) and who provided teacher training in the districts. Normally one formator was in charge of the training of fifty teachers.

In 1998 the Ministry of Education and Science removed the system for budget reasons and the training responsibility was delegated to the inspectors in the local education authorities, on top of their normal observation and other duties. Time showed that this delegation was ineffective. There is a pressing need for a national teacher training system that will identify the needs and organize the general

training and training-by-subject of the teachers. Since 1998, the Albania Education Development Program (AEDP), a national non-governmental organization has implemented a number of pilot projects to this end in the districts of Elbasan, Korca, Tirana, and Durres. Evaluation feedback and results have been very good.

Teaching and learning remain largely traditional in spite of efforts made in the past few years to improve them. Many non-governmental organizations have carried out numerous activities with teachers, university faculty, and education leaders. But the effects have not been what was hoped for as these activities were generally isolated, sporadic, and not well organized. On the positive side, what has been essentially a bottom-up process of reform has allowed individual initiative to be taken in the face of a previous history of centralised control (Whitehead, 2000).

Teaching materials are not sufficient and sometimes not even appropriate. This has led to a further deterioration of the quality of teaching and learning. Textbooks at all levels, especially those of the compulsory education are inadequate. The subject matter is organized in the traditional form of informative, knowledge-giving text and does not support the development of students' thinking skills, inquiry and discovery of phenomena, and problem solving. In fact, whether the cause or the effect of a deficiency in materials, the majority of teaching in Albania is characterized by oral lecture and oral recitation.

Cooperation between educators in Albania and on the international level is still insignificant. There is no infrastructure to support dialogue among educators. Professional organizations of teachers are insignificant and there are no relevant professional publications. The few organizations that exist have a very tepid and isolated professional life. Contact with the international community is even more problematic. Only a few individuals are members of international organizations and participate in international events.

RWCT implementation in Albania

The Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking project (RWCT) started its activity in Albania in 1997 as a network project of the Soros Foundation coordinated by the Open Society Institute, New York. During the first year, the project involved nine countries from Central and Eastern Europe. The number of countries from Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia involved in the project eventually reached twenty-eight.

The project aims at introducing teaching methods and strategies that promote independent, creative and critical thinking. Rather than limiting education to

simply a teacher-centered task of transferring content information to students, the innovative methodology aimed at cultivating elements of group and co-operative learning. These pedagogical shifts reflected and supported a new vision of education; that of enabling teachers and students to develop sound problem-solving skills and become long-life learners.

In its implementation phase during the 1997-1998 academic year, the RWCT Project in Albania involved 30 teachers, school leaders, and university faculty who participated in several 4-day training workshops conducted by volunteer teacher educators from the International Reading Association (IRA). These training workshops were organized around new teaching strategies and methods intended to promote critical thinking. The major program goal for students was to make them active and critical thinkers, to enable them to take responsibility for their own learning, and to provide the habits and strategies needed to become lifelong learners.

The aim of the RWCT project is to form a critical mass of educators to serve as agents of change in schools and other educational institutions in Albania. During the second year of the project, 1998-1999, the first-year trainees became trainers for another 150 teachers, school leaders and university faculty in six districts of the country through a series of two-day workshops held every other month for a period of two years. RWCT was implemented in six districts of the country, where there are teacher-training colleges: Shkoder, Tirana, Elbasan, Korca, Gjirokaster and Vlora.

The dissemination of ideas worked on parallel fronts: in-service teacher training, pre-service teacher training, development of critical thinking courses at the universities, as well as a broad and effective publication program. RWCT in Albania aimed at re-dimensioning classroom teaching and establishing sustainable models of teacher training. After three years, the dissemination of the project was as follows: 27 teachers, university faculty, and educators from other educational establishments completed the first series of workshops and fulfilled the criteria to become national certified trainers. Another 200 teachers and educators participated in regular RWCT workshops. An additional 34 university faculty attended a short RWCT training course while approximately 250 teachers attended a version of RWCT training. In addition, 25 publishers have been trained in ways of incorporating the RWCT methodology in their textbooks.

The Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking Project has spawned an ambitious publication program of its own. The RWCT program was presented in a series of guidebooks to accompany each of the different workshop topics. Originally published by the International Reading Association, these guidebooks were revised to fit the Albanian context and translated into the Albanian language. The original titles of the eight guidebooks:

1. *A Framework For The Development Of Critical Thinking Across The Curricula*
2. *Development Of Critical Thinking*
3. *Reading, Writing, And Discussion In Every Discipline*
4. *Further Techniques For The Development Of Critical Thinking*
5. *Co-operative Learning*
6. *Lesson Planning And Evaluation*
7. *The Writing Workshop: From Self Expression To Written Arguments*
8. *Creating Thoughtful Readers*

As the program was implemented and the cascade dissemination began, the need for additional materials became clear. Ancillary and supporting materials were developed either in collaboration with international consultants or completely by Albanian educators. These publications included an anthology of readings in educational psychology *Study Everything, Reason First*; a national quarterly professional journal *Mprehesi* (Focus); a collection of sample model lessons *Models for Successful teaching: Methodological Guide For The Implementation Of Critical Thinking Across Classes And Subjects*; and a practical guide to implementing new pedagogical approaches *Creating Child-Centered Classrooms*.

Methodology

We began our inquiry into the nature of transformative professional development with a very basic distinction and premise. Whereas technical development programs, even the very best, aim to transmit technical competence for application in highly specific contexts (e.g., English as a Second Language methodology, computer desktop publishing, football skills, etc), transformative development programs transmit information that enables participants to apply competence in innovative ways and novel contexts. From this distinction we suggest that transformative development programs should not only have an impact on increasing participants' competence and effectiveness (as teachers, teacher educators, or school administrators, see program evaluation executive summary, www.rwct.org), but should also enhance participants' capacity (i.e., enhanced skill plus self-concept) to apply this new information in a variety of new contexts. Quite simply, we set out to document instances where participants did just that.

In fact, we did observe that a number of RWCT participants had taken on new roles and responsibilities as a result of their experiences in the workshops and through implementing program methodology in their classrooms. We set out to determine what factors contributed to such transformations.

We wondered whether participant characteristics (e.g., age, gender, years of experience, place on the education hierarchy) contributed to such dramatic shifts.

We considered the possibility that any innovative professional development program might appeal primarily to stronger, more experienced educators, people more likely to be risk-takers and leaders.

We also wondered if there were program characteristics that contributed to the powerful changes we were observing. The RWCT program consists of a variety of different elements. These include a series of intense, interactive workshops conducted by volunteer teacher educators from the International Reading Association via local professional translators. The volunteers were experienced professors of education from universities in the United States. The workshops were based in a series of written guidebooks for facilitators and participants. These workshop materials were translated into Albanian during year one of the project, then subsequently rewritten by Albanian educators. The workshops were characterized as highly practical in which teaching techniques were demonstrated, followed immediately by critical discussion.

An important program feature was the guided implementation of the teaching techniques that had been demonstrated in the workshop. Workshop leaders helped each participant develop an implementation lesson that fit his or her grade level or subject area. Prior to implementing lessons, participants had opportunities for microteaching and for receiving feedback from the workshop facilitators and other participants.

We wondered whether the delivery system of the program contributed to the outcomes we were observing. The RWCT program was delivered at four intervals across an entire academic year. Between these workshops interim sessions were held for discussion, self-evaluation, and problem solving. Local, in-country facilitators moderated these interim sessions. During the second and third years of the program a cohort of certified RWCT-trained Albanians took over responsibility for facilitating workshops and conducting classroom observations,

Finally we were interested to know whether participants were able to connect specific aspects of the program with shifts in their thinking, growth in self-concept, or enhanced interaction with colleagues, students, and other members of the school community.

The Survey

We developed a survey instrument (see appendix) consisting of three parts. The first part, a personal profile, categorized responders by years of experience in the project, gender, age, education assignment, and years of teaching experience.

The second portion of the survey asked respondents to evaluate the level of impact participation in the RWCT project had on their thinking or actions in the following areas: relationship with students, relationship with colleagues, relationship to curriculum, definition of teaching and learning, relationship with students' parents, and overall motivation and satisfaction as a teacher.

In the third part of the survey we asked responders to identify personal and professional roles and responsibilities they have taken on since their participation in RWCT began. The range of new responsibilities included: teacher educator, author, mentor, consultant, administrator, editor, conference presenter, and education researcher. We asked responders to briefly describe connections between participation in RWCT and their new roles and responsibilities.

Preliminary drafts of the survey instrument were reviewed by peers. Reviewers' comments and suggestions were incorporated into a revised draft. The survey was then translated into the Albanian language and field-tested before a final version was prepared. The survey instrument was hand-distributed during meetings of different groups of program participants (past and present). The surveys were distributed mainly in Tirana, Elbasan, and Korce, regions accessible by automobile. The total number of completed surveys was fifty-four (n=54).

Summary and observations of the survey data

The summary data from the personal profiles are shown in Table 1.

The data reflect a pool of responders that was mainly female, mainly

TABLE 1: New roles and responsibilities

Source	<u>DF</u>	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Value	Pr>F
Model	6	72.7451025	12.1241838	8.47	<.0001
Error	43	51.5748975	1.4319744		
Corrected Total	49	134.3200000			

R-Square Coeff Var Root MSE nRoles Mean
0.541581 76.70842 1,196651 1.560000

Source	DF	Type III SS	Mean Square	F Value	Pr>F
Q1	2	28.88651674	14.44325837	10.09	0.0003
Q5	3	15.10265601	5.03421867	3.52	0.0229

elementary and secondary level educators, mainly experienced (i.e., more than six years of experience in education), and between one and three years of participation in the RWCT program.

The data from the second portion of the survey revealed that participation in the Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking project had ‘very great impact’ on participants’ relationship with students, colleagues, teaching and learning, and participants’ motivation and satisfaction as educators. All of the participant responders felt the project had an impact on their definitions of teaching and learning. The summary data from the second portion of the survey is shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2: Summary of effects

Relationship to students	Relationship to colleagues	Relationship to curriculum	Relationship with students’ parents	Definition of teaching & learning	Teachers’ motivation & satisfaction
0.....	0.....	0.....	0 (7.69%)	0.....	0.....
1.....	1 (18.52%)	1.....	1 (11.54%)	1.....	1.....
2 (3.7%)	2 (12.96%)	2 (7.41%)	2 (26.92%)	2	2 (7.41%)
3 (35.19%)	3 (35.19%)	3 (40.74%)	3 ((25.00%)	3 (20.75%)	3 (25.93%)
4 (61.11%)	4 (33.33%)	4 (51.85%)	4 (28.85%)	4 (79.25%)	4 (66.67%)

Note:

- 0 = no effect
- 1 = very little effect
- 2 = moderate effect
- 3 = great effect
- 4 = very great effect

Survey respondents were unable to pinpoint any specific feature of the program that contributed to these impacts. However, as the table suggests however, the participants’ perceptions were that they had received a great deal more than simple technical skills. In an attempt to probe the situation further, we followed up with a series of individual interviews. We decided to interview educators from Tirana, Elbasan, and Korce.

The interviews

We contacted approximately 15 educators—classroom teachers, administrators, and university faculty—who volunteered to be interviewed and videotaped. The interviews were based on responses to the question: *How has*

your participation in the Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking program affected your personal and professional life? Interviews were conducted in Albanian, videotaped, then transcribed by a professional translator.

As we reviewed the participants' reflective responses about their lives since participating in the Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking program some interesting patterns began to emerge.

Generally, respondents emphasized that changes in their competence went far beyond the acquisition of new technical skill. Their participation seemed to be a gateway to new worlds of opportunity and responsibility. Respondents appeared confident in their abilities to take on and successfully meet these new challenges.

The project itself created entrepreneurial and intellectual opportunities for new products and services. Some workshop participants saw themselves as thinkers and doers in supplying these products and services. For example Ali, a professor in a teacher preparation program, described his contributions as author of several written products (journals, books, instructional materials, etc.) that resulted directly from the program.

'We are now working on our publications...we have been incorporating many of the techniques we have been learning during the critical thinking project. I am a regular contributor to the journal Sharpness of Mind. I have published three articles. At the same time I have published a textbook that combines Albanian linguistics and critical thinking...And using the framework of the critical thinking project, I have published two other textbooks that are directly related to my daily work with the students.'

Other participants described the how the format of the program influenced their way of working. Mimoza, a veteran teacher educator, described the impact of the deliberate interaction, guided discussion, and collaboration during workshops on fostering a new spirit of collegiality.

'I would evaluate as one of the most important elements of the critical thinking project the work we do in groups. It is one of the defining moments of the project that has brought together many intellectuals, working on joint groups, doing common work and feeling success together. I'll give an example: The organization we founded is very close to the critical thinking project and it is the National Reading Association. Though it is a very new association with modest contribution in this field, together with other associations we may undertake new initiatives.'

We were intrigued to find classroom teachers applying the pedagogical ideas in contexts other than classrooms. These ideas appeared to have had an important effect on reshaping their views of themselves as teachers and learners. The

experience of Zhuljeta, an experienced history teacher reflects this shift in self-concept:

‘At the beginning I was thinking that only little things had changed in me. I was provided with some new techniques, I was feeling comfortable during my classes, I was feeling certain when teaching and like that. But later I noticed that the change was big. I was invited by the University to be part of a group for the drafting of alternative texts. When I was giving my ideas about how to write this text, I noticed that I was giving more interesting ideas than the other members of the group, ideas that were welcomed by the other members of the groups. People thought my ideas were interesting. I said the text should not be structured like we used to do it but it should be according to the elements of critical thinking, to have elements that would confront students with different alternatives, that would make them think, that would ask them questions that would make them express their ideas.’

Other participants, described how the concepts and the techniques presented in the program helped guide them in their new careers, not only helping them become effective in their new positions but also enabling them to make sense of their new roles. The comments of Aurela, a classroom teacher turned researcher reflected this.

‘I had been working as elementary school teacher for five years and afterwards I started work as researcher in the Institute of Pedagogical Studies. This project helped me to view the process of teaching and learning from a different angle. This has carried over to my work on the training programs for new teachers, and the development of the new elementary school curricula. I have grown also as a member of the project. From a teacher receiving training I have become a trainer of other teachers. I have been taking part in some professional conferences organized in and out of the country. I have been assisted a lot by the joint work with foreign experts with whom I have written an article ‘How to become a teacher researcher.’ So, the profession of the teacher and the profession of the researcher have been going together.’

It was interesting to us that the cascade model of dissemination, a train-the-trainer system, stimulated the development of new traditions of mentoring. Participants who became trainers of other cohorts of Albanian classroom teachers took on the new responsibility for training and mentoring other adults. They expressed confidence in their ability to do so effectively as a direct result of their experiences in the RWCT program. This is particularly striking in a context where traditions of hierarchy and authority distinguishing between higher education and primary education, males and females, and regional cultural groups have

tended to constrain mentoring relationships. The experience of Brikena, a young female teacher with relatively little classroom experience illustrates the impact of participation on establishing professional relationships.

‘To work in a class with the methods of critical thinking means we teachers should be critical, creative, open to accept diversity—not only to have these qualities for ourselves but also to know how to model these for others. Besides the changes in myself, there have been changes in my work as well. I have been an elementary school teacher in one of Tirana schools. This project provided me with skills that I am now improving. These made me credible in front of other teachers. I have written practical articles for the use of the new techniques in the schools. I am a member of the journal board that is publicizing this project in Albania and in other countries. These are steps that I have been climbing one by one thanks to my participation in the project.’

One unanticipated outcome was the impact the program had on school administrators, inspectors, and other supervisory personnel. The program’s central theme of a student-centered approach to education found applications in school administration as well. Fatmir, a school director in Tirana, described how participation in this program influenced his interactions with teachers in his school.

‘This project has made it possible to view things and problems differently. The rapid developments in our society demand new perspectives. And critical thinking is one suitable perspective for these—seeing things not as static objects but as developing phenomena, to analyze, to see a problem in motion, in relation to other contexts and to promote opposing ideas—in order to solve problems our school is actually facing. We need new alternatives now. Not only from students, but from teachers. I invite new alternatives because having different alternatives means viewing a problem from different angles and the ultimate decisions can be better. Of course that is a huge change.’

The RWCT project emphasized that problems and social interactions are open to diverse perspectives of interpretation and multiple possibilities for action and resolution. Initially, these ideas were introduced in the context of responding to literature. Liliana, a school director, spoke about how she applied this concept to her relationships with teachers in her school.

‘I really feel I am not so rigid as I used to be when I started. I am much more tolerant, much more cooperative, and leave a lot of space to the teachers. I do not say that this should be done like that, but I ask the others how they think it can be done.’

Conclusions

The original aim of the RWCT program was to introduce innovative, student-centered techniques for instruction and assessment of literacy. These techniques were intended to promote active learning and critical thinking. While the program was unquestionably successful in its goal of introducing new pedagogy, a somewhat more remarkable phenomenon occurred.

We observed that the participants in this program (cohort after cohort) underwent profound shifts in the way they viewed the teaching and learning process, and in the way they viewed themselves as teachers and learners. Looking across the interviews and surveys we concluded that the most profound aspect of this program may have been the very nature of new ways of thinking about and using language—reading, writing, reflection, opinion—formation, discussion, and consensus building.

We conclude that teachers who experience a new understanding of literacy begin to see language itself in a new way. This powerful new conceptualization of communication (i.e., that everyone is entitled to and responsible for author original ideas and not just recite known information; that all information is subject to interpretation and multiple perspectives; that all complex contexts—natural or social—require complex and multiple solutions, etc.) permeated and transformed a variety of social relationships not limited to teacher-student interactions.

Participants appeared to connect their own professional development to factors that were more general, and we suspect therefore having greater applicability. These factors included attention to the social nature of communication. The literacy development activities revealed how important language was for social interaction. In a similar vein, the program emphasized the functional nature of communication. In other words, the program shifted communicative competence from a school objective to a social goal.

The RWCT program attacked the traditional pedagogical concept of a single correct response for every teacher or textbook question. Attempting to better match learning tasks with real world tasks, RWCT activities not only enabled teachers to become comfortable with notions of divergent over convergent thinking it also enhanced their tolerance for ambiguity and open-endedness. This had implications that extended well beyond the understanding of texts. It appeared to permeate all levels of social interaction and problem solving. The RWCT program makes it unlikely that any authoritarian voice will be able to dominate the group. This democratizing element of literate behavior, i.e., that events are open to multiple valid perspectives, was reflected in democratizing effects in other areas of social intercourse.

We observed that the program's presentation of techniques that promote collaborative learning provided participants with meaningful experiences about group work. Moreover, the collaborative nature of the program that included extensive pair and group work had powerful effects on participants' ideas about organizing themselves in problem-solving situations. The program itself repeatedly emphasized cooperation over competition and coercion. Again, while these ideas were originally conceived as shifting the relationship between teachers and students, we saw that this theme repeated as well in the relationships between teachers and their peers, teachers and administrators, and teachers and the rest of the school community.

Finally we suggest that the RWCT program succeeded in its widespread implementation for the simple reason that at its core, the program was intended to empower individuals not to control them. Unlike most programs of technical development that aim merely to enhance individuals' technical skills and that these skills ultimately are used to control the destinies of others (most often students), real programs of professional development aim to provide participants with the intellectual strategies and perspectives they need to control their own destinies and to transform their own lives and their interactions with others. We would suggest that with the continued demand for professional development program organizers keep these larger goals in mind.

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