

Spotlight on Schools

Students at the Center of the Instructional Circle

Project: Scope & Goals

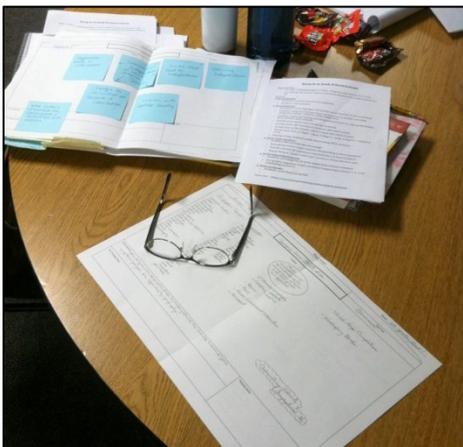
UCBHSSP had come to the attention of Colorado Springs District 11 (CSD11) curriculum team at a national conference, and we were invited to present at their district's 2013 summit, *Disciplinary Literacy: Honoring Language & Thinking in Academic Disciplines*. What began as leading the social studies strand at the summit, turned into a multi-year relationship with the eight TAP schools within the district, five elementary, two middle, and one high school. TAP™ (The System for Teacher and Student Advancement) helps schools provide professional development to teachers, through the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET). In May of 2013, UCBHSSP launched a two-year partnership with CSD11 in Colorado, providing support to elementary, middle and high school history teachers in reshaping their pedagogy to drive student learning and meet the new demands of the Common Core era.



In the first year of the partnership, teachers were released from their classes to attend monthly UCBHSSP trainings, focusing on embedding explicit reading and writing instruction into their history lessons. At each training, teachers created lessons that incorporated discipline-specific literacy strategies. In addition to this explicit planning for literacy, the teachers participated in a cycle of inquiry. Following the introduction of a new strategy, teachers returned with samples of student work generated from teaching the strategy. This cycle of instruction provided space for teachers to deeply reflect on their teaching practice, their implementation of new pedagogical tools, and to continue modifying the strategies to meet the specific needs of their students. Over the course of that first year, participating teachers grew to adopt this reflective practice consistently and shared it with colleagues not yet using these practices. They began to see fundamental changes in their instruction when they embedded a cycle of inquiry into their practice.

Amidst a second year of work with the CSD11 TAP schools, we have collectively dug deeper into the shared practice of shaping curriculum to address students' specific learning needs. This year, in addition to discipline-specific literacy and thinking workshops, UCBHSSP trainer, Emily Richards, is working with teachers in their classrooms -- coaching, demo-ing lessons, observing, and providing feedback. The year's work will be capped with a summer institute.

Commitment of Teachers and Administrators



The work with Colorado Springs District 11 serves as a model for what can happen when district and site leadership commit to the long term professional growth of teachers. At CSD11, the collaborative development of this work between teachers, administrators, and UCBHSSP has led to deeper learning among teachers and, consequently, their students. One particularly exciting example is the work among the fourth and fifth grade teachers at Wilson Elementary School.

When the teacher leaders from Wilson Elementary showed up for the first day of training, they were excited to begin this work. By the end of that first day, which was now over a year ago, they began asking how they could disseminate what they were learning to their whole school.

Throughout last spring, they shared the UCBHSSP planning model and strategies with their colleagues, building interest and commitment from both teachers and administrators alike. During the summer institute in 2014, the entire 4th and 5th grade teams joined their department chairs and site coach with the express goal of figuring out how to lay UCBHSSP learning strategies as the foundation for literacy instruction across the school site. This year, work with Wilson Elementary teachers continues. They are creating curriculum aligned to the Common Core and student needs. Additionally, UCBHSSP trainers have been invited into classrooms to [demo lessons](#) with students so that the teachers can observe these pedagogical shifts within their specific context. As a team, these teachers came into the work with a strong learner stance and a desire to share and work collaboratively with colleagues. Their enthusiasm has allowed for deeper partnership and support of deeper learning for both the teachers and the students.

Outcomes & Successes

Since UCBHSSP began this collaboration with CSD11, there have been multiple positive outcomes for both teachers and students. This long term collaboration around a shared goal and vision has nurtured a collaborative community among the teachers, leading the way for a more open and shared practice of teaching. Additionally, students' Measure of Academic Program state test scores have improved at the school, and a number of the teachers who fully embraced the UCBHSSP disciplinary model saw marked growth in their students' reading comprehension and analysis of texts. Through this intensive collaborative work, students who otherwise may have struggled with increased academic demands are finding success as they have been provided with a framework to read, write, and speak about history. The capacity for their students' success has been built by the collaborative and student-centered nature of the CSD11 teachers and the constant push to refine pedagogical practices to meet the needs of students.

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