

TEACHERS' TIME: COLLABORATING
FOR LEARNING, TEACHING, AND LEADING

“The Kids Benefit From It, So It’s Worth It”: Time for Teaching and Learning at SMASH

By Dion Burns, Soung Bae, and Jon D. Snyder





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Introduction — Time and Learning in Schools

The organization and use of teacher time in schools is an issue that does not receive a great deal of attention. This inattention is perhaps in part because the structure of time may be considered an aspect of the received “grammar of schooling” (Tyack & Tobin, 1994). These are the elements of schooling so commonplace that they often go unnoticed or unchallenged: elementary classrooms with a single teacher instructing multiple subjects (e.g., English and mathematics), bells that mark the start and end of each class, student learning focused on acquiring (or memorizing) knowledge encoded in textbooks, and teachers sitting alone in their classrooms during their “prep” periods. That a new grammar is needed, however, is increasingly apparent.

With changes in the workplace and society driven by factors such as shifting technologies and an interdependent global village (Autor & Price, 2013), students must be prepared to apply knowledge to novel problems and circumstances. Among the goals of education is an enhanced need to include competencies such as collaboration and communication and a mindset that is oriented towards learning how to learn. This requires a shift in teaching practice and opportunities for teachers to continually improve their practice, incorporating new instructional techniques and ways to engage students. Reimagining the use of time within schools can facilitate opportunities for teachers to collaborate and develop their skills to achieve these goals.

The value to student learning of teacher collaboration—and dedicated time for it—is supported by international research. Collaborative and supportive school working environments are associated with benefits both for teacher effectiveness (Kraft & Papay, 2014) and for student learning (Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007; Jackson & Bruegmann, 2009). Additionally, the 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) of middle school teachers, conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), found that increased teacher collaboration was associated with greater teacher job satisfaction and self-efficacy—a belief in their abilities to manage classrooms, provide high-quality instruction, and engage students in learning (OECD, 2014). Moreover, in countries where teachers had opportunities to collaborate in professional learning, they were more likely to use the active teaching practices associated with the aforementioned competencies (OECD, 2014). This collaboration requires time for teachers to learn with, and from, each other.

This case study profiles one school, Santa Monica Alternative School House (SMASH), that has organized time in a way that differs from the traditional school model, with an eye on developing these competencies. Based on a model of teaching

and learning that is oriented towards greater exploratory learning time for students, grounded in social learning theory, and that provides opportunities for learning beyond school walls, SMASH has shaped a different structure of time for teachers.

Time at SMASH is crafted around an approach to learning that focuses on growing strong relationships between teachers and students as well as among the teaching staff themselves. This strategy helps create a school culture that supports collaboration. Teachers have opportunities to collaborate frequently, to grow relationships, to learn with and from each other, and to plan learning opportunities for students. Teachers have agency over how time is structured to best facilitate learning for their students, and time is used flexibly to account for changing circumstances. This allows teachers to try out new instructional strategies and to support individual student learning needs and well-being. As one teacher described, “The thing about time that works here and the way it’s structured is that it’s intentional and flexible and evolving.”

In this case study, we look at how time is organized, the opportunities time creates for teacher and student learning, and the enabling conditions that support this kind of model.

Methodology

A case study methodology was used for the SMASH inquiry. The history and context of the school was derived from a preliminary phone interview with the principal and a review of the school’s website and documents. Documents included teacher and student schedules, School Accountability Report Cards (SARCs), state reporting data and professional development goals, and parent engagement and climate surveys.

Additional data collection took place during a 3-day site visit, which included semi-structured individual or paired interviews and observations of classroom practice and meetings. Interviewees included the principal and nine teachers of record. An analysis of interview data was conducted using NVivo qualitative software to identify key themes. Observations of regular classroom teaching were conducted, including morning advisory meetings with students and literacy, social studies, mathematics, and engineering classes. Observations of teacher meetings included both common planning time (teachers meeting in pairs or as a trio), and a whole-school staff inquiry session, involving all teachers and teaching assistants. A draft of the case study was shared with the principal who checked it for accuracy and enriched our analysis.

School History and Context

SMASH is situated just blocks from the beach on California’s Pacific coast. It was founded in 1973, based on a constructivist educational philosophy of promoting greater student involvement in developing the curriculum and directing their own learning. As the school principal explains, “The foundation of the school is that student voice and choice, and learning through interest for both the adults and kids alike, is essential.”

SMASH is a K–8 public school in the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District (SMMUSD). It is a school of choice, with admission by lottery. A first lottery is conducted for children of families resident in the SMMUSD area, with a second conducted for those outside the district if space is available. Priority in admission is given to students with siblings already attending the school. Interested parents are first encouraged to attend a school tour, meaning that those who apply for their children’s entry tend to be those who are attracted to the school’s philosophy and approach to learning. The school likewise tries to maintain an engaged parent community with frequent contact between parents and teachers and a weekly newsletter.

SMASH is co-located with another district-run elementary school. The two schools share communal playgrounds, a cafeteria and lunch area, and a library. This arrangement provides some scheduling constraints and is one of several external influences on the way time is organized at SMASH.

School Philosophy

SMASH’s website highlights the major tenets of the school’s philosophy and how these shape teaching and learning at the school: “We strive to help children become active citizens in a democracy that is still being shaped. We want our students to be part of that shaping in ethical, moral, creative and thoughtful ways” (SMMUSD, n.d.). A strong emphasis on social and emotional learning was seen as a foundational element to this approach. As one teacher described,

We are a whole-child school, so our philosophy is that the children are very dynamic, they have social, emotional, and academic needs, and that each of them are equally important, and that equal amount of time and attention needs to be put into each.

SMASH seeks to provide learning that is real-world connected and project based, organized around themes that combine several subjects, and evaluated through authentic assessments that emphasize student capabilities. This focus on real-world connected learning is behind the significant number of field trips and learning opportunities that take place outside the school. The principal noted that students were

going out into the community almost every week. For some classes, field trips supported in-class projects, yet one teacher indicated that the trips also served a broader purpose of creating inquisitive learners: “The main [purpose] is to enjoy learning; to see how much there is to learn outside a classroom.”

These principles of learning and the philosophy of co-constructing teaching and learning frame much of the work of teachers and how they interact with each other, as well as the flexibility with which time is allocated and used at SMASH. The principal described the school philosophy and structures as designed to promote team teaching, shared space, and children having a voice in their learning.

Staff and Students at SMASH

SMASH is a small school, with just 227 students total in the 2015–16 school year, around 25 per grade (see Table 1). There are 9 teachers and 3 instructional assistants for general education, 2.6 full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers and 5 paraeducators for special education, and a principal employed at 0.8 FTE. There is also a literacy coach (at 0.5 FTE) who works with teachers across grade levels to support academic instruction in literacy. SMASH has a teaching staff with considerable experience. Although several of the staff were relatively new to the school (just 2 years), all had been teaching for 10 years or more. There is only one class cohort—and one teacher of record—per grade, which presents some challenges for teachers in collaborating on issues of pedagogical content.

TABLE 1. SMASH STUDENT ENROLLMENT BY GRADE, 2015–2016

2015–16 STUDENT ENROLLMENT BY GRADE LEVEL	
GRADE LEVEL	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
Kindergarten	22
Grade 1	24
Grade 2	25
Grade 3	24
Grade 4	26
Grade 5	26
Grade 6	26
Grade 7	29
Grade 8	25
Total Enrollment	227

The student body is 60% White, with Latinos (12%) constituting the second largest student demographic group (see Table 2). Twenty percent of the students identify with more than one racial category. The SMMUSD area incorporates a relatively affluent area of northwest Los Angeles, and the school has few students that qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Additionally, few students are classified as English Language Learners, although the principal notes that a significant number of students do in fact come from bilingual households, or those where English is an additional language.

More than 1 in 10 students at SMASH is classified as having a disability. This is due in part to the school’s role in the

TABLE 2. SMASH STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS, 2015–2016

2015–16 STUDENT ENROLLMENT BY GROUP	
GROUP	PERCENT OF TOTAL ENROLLMENT
Black or African American	3.5
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.4
Asian	2.6
Filipino	0
Hispanic or Latino	15
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0
White	59.9
Two or More Races	18.5
Socioeconomically Disadvantaged	5.3
English Learners	3.1
Students with Disabilities	11
Foster Youth	0

district STEP (Structured Therapeutic Education Program). SMASH’s emphasis on social and emotional learning makes it the district-designated school for those STEP students whose disability is identified as relating to emotional needs. SMASH’s special education student numbers have increased in recent years. In the 2016–17 school year, 18.5% of its 225 students were receiving special education services through an IEP (Individual Education Plan), up from 11% the previous year.

The school organizes its 7.6 FTE special education staff into two teams, providing a combination of “pull-out” services (in which students step out of regular classes for work on goals with a special education team) and “push-in” services (in which special education staff work with students in class) depending on student needs. One team, consisting of two special education teachers (1.6

FTE) and two paraeducators, provides specialized academic instruction, supporting students with goals in subject areas such as reading, writing, and mathematics, or with goals related to executive function, attention, or focus. The paraeducators work with students in class to provide additional assistance as needed. A second team of one special education teacher and three paraeducators serves the school’s specialized STEP, for students whose challenges relate to internalizing behaviors, such as anxiety or depression. STEP operates from a separate classroom, but the team moves in and out of the general education classrooms with students as they are ready to join.

School Outcomes

In general, student learning outcomes at SMASH are above district and state averages, according to the most recent SARC. Seventy-eight percent of the students in grades 3–8 met or exceeded state standards in English language arts (ELA), and 66% met or exceeded state standards in mathematics on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (California Department of Education, 2017). There are some differences among grades though, with four of six tested grades in ELA, and three of six tested grades in mathematics, scoring above district averages.

However, the small cohort size in each grade level means that these numbers may also be sensitive to a relatively small number of students.

Parent engagement and school climate surveys show strong parent support for the school. For example, 95% of responding parents reported they were satisfied with the quality of their children’s education (SMMUSD, 2015). In addition, 93% of responding parents indicated that SMASH communicates its mission and vision, makes decisions in the best interests of students, and that there are staff members to whom a student can go for help with a school or personal problem (personal communication with school principal, May 23, 2017).

Bell Schedule

Like other schools, SMASH has a regular bell schedule. On Mondays through Thursdays, school begins at 8:30am, with a recess at 10:15am and lunch at 12:25pm, and ends at 3:00pm for Grades 1–8 (at 1:30pm daily for Kindergarten). On Fridays, the entire student body is released early at 1:30pm, after which staff meetings begin. However, within this broad schedule, student and teacher schedules vary, depending on the “core” to which students and teachers belong. There are also 10 minimum-day schedules in which all K–8 students leave at 1:30pm. Events such as parent-teacher conferences are held during the 10 minimum-day schedules.

School Organization—Cores

The way that SMASH is organized plays a significant role in shaping teachers' time and work. The school is arranged into smaller units known as "cores." Core 1 covers the three grades from Kindergarten through grade 2, with Cores 2–4 covering grades 3–4, 5–6, and 7–8 respectively.

Cores are allowed to function with some independence of each other, including autonomy over scheduling. Teachers in each core develop their cores' schedule (within agreed-upon principles and some logistical constraints, discussed below), including how time is apportioned for learning within the overall bell schedule, and when they wish to collaborate.

Within each core are multi-age classes. Although some activities do take place in single-grade groups (e.g., mathematics), most learning takes place in a multi-age setting. Peer learning is an important element of schooling at SMASH, with older students learning alongside and mentoring younger students. Students also "loop" with their teachers, having the same pair (or trio, in the case of Core 1) of teachers for the 2 (or 3) years that they spend in each core before progressing to the next. Special education teachers are not assigned to a specific core but work with students across cores.

The multi-age classes move between teachers within the core throughout the day, so that the approximately 50 (or 75) students in each core spend nearly equal time with all teachers in the core. Although each teacher is formally a Teacher of Record for one grade, teachers viewed themselves as responsible for all students in the core, with one instructor commenting,

It's multi-age, but it's more of a philosophy that we see us as all three of us [two core teachers and an instructional aide] working with all 50 children and getting to know them and collaborating and maybe giving each other insights, valuing their different learning styles more so than their age, if that makes sense. Working wherever they are, moving them forward.

Each core also has some autonomy over the curriculum, with teachers (and students) having input into decisions regarding the themes studied, projects undertaken, and out-of-school learning experiences and field trips. These decisions can shape the way each core both structures its schedule and uses time on a day-to-day basis.

Organization of Students Within Cores

As with the cores themselves, within each core, students are also organized differently. The most significant difference is between the upper (Cores 3 and 4) and lower (Cores 1 and 2) grades. Because SMASH is a K–8 school and most graduating students will move on to the large neighboring high school (of nearly 3,000 students), classes for upper grades at SMASH have been organized in a way that gives students something of a “traditional” middle school experience within a small, alternatively structured school.

In Core 4, for example, students across grades 7 and 8 are divided into two multi-age groups—“Values” and “Justice”—for their Monday and Wednesday classes. In these groups, students study engineering in a block schedule, followed by humanities, or vice versa. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, students are arranged into different groupings, “Ospreys” and “Peregrines,” for humanities and science. Students also have advisory periods, which are used primarily for the school’s social and emotional curriculum, in two different groups. This mix of groupings within the school week gives students opportunities to work with and learn from different combinations of peers. As one teacher explained,

Something that we’ve realized for the seventh- and eighth-graders is that they need more mixture among themselves. So instead of just having one advisory, they have two advisories. So, on Monday and Wednesdays they have a group and on Tuesday and Thursdays they have a group. So, everybody can get a little bit of everybody.

Groups are then reshuffled again for the second half of the year. This variety of peer interactions was viewed by both Core 4 teachers as valuable to student learning: “I can tell you, as a teacher it’s a pain in the butt to have to regroup kids and reschedule, remake who fits with whom. But the kids benefit from it, so it’s worth it.”

As each core operates relatively independently and is able to develop its own schedule and organization, an important consideration in scheduling at SMASH is to coordinate the use of common spaces and times, such as physical education (P.E.), library time, and music.

Despite this independence, common features exist across core schedules, including block scheduling and advisory periods. As the school’s principal noted, “We are a workshop model school. There will be a reading, writing, and math workshop block in every schedule.” These elements are influenced by two major elements of the curriculum at SMASH: inquiry and experiential learning, and social and emotional learning.

Organization of Time at SMASH

Block Scheduling—Experiential and Project-Based Learning

A common feature across the schedules is block periods (see Tables 3 and 4). In Core 4, for example, the day is roughly divided into morning, middle, and afternoon blocks, each around 1 hour 45 minutes. On Mondays, the first block is divided into two 50-minute periods, in which two groups of students alternate between mathematics and P.E. The major purpose of block scheduling is to allow sufficient time for extended learning in the workshop model.

When one group of students (“Justice”) has a 1-hour-35-minute block period of engineering using a program known as *Project Lead the Way*, the other group (“Values”) has a block of humanities. After lunch, the two student groups switch teachers for a 1-hour-50-minute block of the same subjects. This schedule is repeated on Wednesdays, but in the reverse order and balancing the 15-minute difference in length between the middle and afternoon block periods.

The use of block periods by each core is reflective of SMASH’s emphasis on project- and inquiry-based learning. The school uses the *Writers’ Workshop* model, in which considerable time is set aside for independent student work, combined with small group work and teacher modeling. In the Core 1 and 2 classes we observed, this generally took the form of a teacher-led mini-lesson, followed by independent or group work time, and then a “share” where students discuss their progress, or something they observed or learned to reinforce the learning objectives of the mini-lesson.

Six of nine teachers interviewed cited the importance of the block periods in facilitating student learning. One Core 4 teacher explained that these longer blocks of time were particularly important in subjects such as engineering. Visiting this class, we observed students engaged in a design project using computer software to render 3-D images of mechanical components, casting 2-D projections of the object, and applying labels to indicate the objects’ physical dimensions (see Figure 1). The teacher explained that these block periods were important for students to have sufficient time to experiment, which could involve students tinkering with mechanical and electronic components to build physical models.

Another Core 4 teacher echoed this sentiment, noting that much learning time within each class period could be lost in bringing students’ attention to task and creating and cleaning up the classroom environment:

I think because you can’t get going in anything in 50 minutes. It takes some 10 minutes to settle down, and you have to give 5 minutes at least to clean up at the end, and if you had a 50-minute block, you’re only really getting 30 minutes.

They do a lot of research. They're creating a project or a slide show or debate practice: they have to do research, gather their notes. There's a lot of social activity so that always takes more time because you get off topic and the kids get off topic, but that's normal and then you say, "Okay, let's get work done." It just allows for that time.

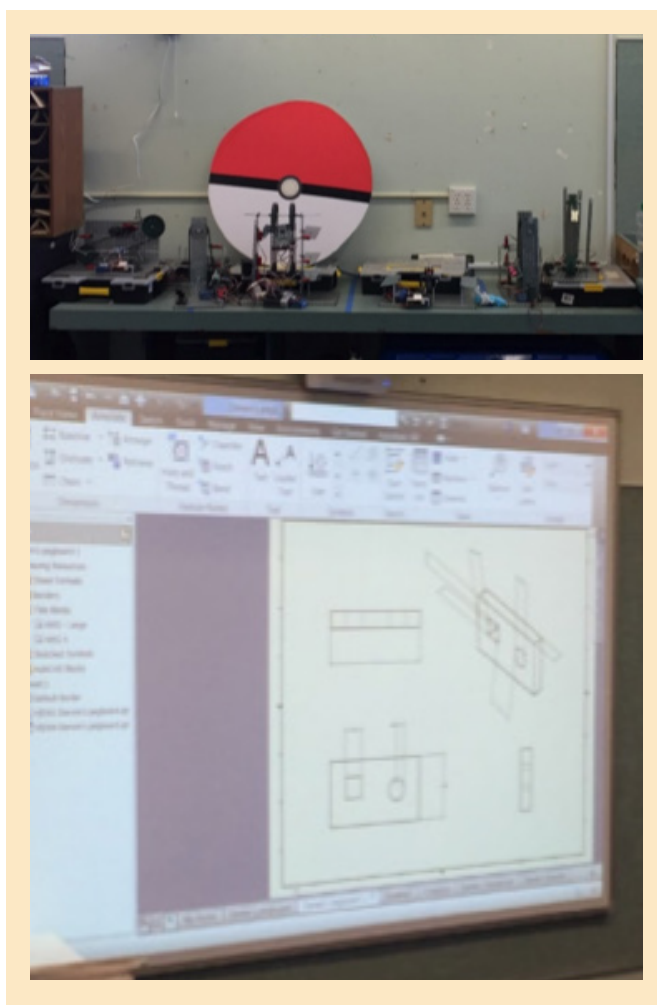
Even with the block scheduling, for the kids to have their experimental session, we didn't get through all the kids because it takes them a long time getting into [hands-on activities like] sawing and "Oh, the sawing's really hard, or how do you drill, how do you use the tools properly?"

Similarly, a Core 3 teacher described how block periods helped avoid loss of time resulting from students moving between periods:

I think the biggest shift for us, though, is I really push for double blocks of time with the children so that I get them for a solid 2 hours for literacy rather than an hour here and there, because I find that the transitions cut out so much instructional time, whereas when you get them for 2 hours you're only transitioning once to come in.

The importance of block schedules ascribed by SMASH teachers to student learning was further highlighted during a conversation we observed between two teachers of a core and the school literacy coach. The coach was reviewing the weekly schedule with the teachers to find ways to increase the number of weekly literacy minutes. An initial proposal to achieve this increase was to use the first half of an existing "STEAM" (Science, Technology,

FIGURE 1.
CORE 4 ENGINEERING CLASS AT SMASH



■ Direct Contact with Students
 ■ Collaboration Time
 ■ Individual Teacher Time

TABLE 3: SMASH CORE 4 SCHEDULE (GRADES 7 AND 8), FALL 2016, MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY

BLOCK	TIME	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	BLOCK	TIME	FRIDAY
1	8:30–9:20	Individual Planning	Humanities & Science	Individual Planning	Humanities & Science	1	8:30–9:20	Field Science & Humanities
	9:25–10:15	Math		Math			9:25–10:15	
—	10:15–10:35	Break	Break	Break	Break	—	10:15–10:35	Break
2	10:35–12:10	Engineering & Humanities	Humanities & Science	Engineering & Humanities	Humanities & Science	2	10:35–11:35	Math
	12:10–12:25	Advisory	Advisory	Advisory	Advisory		11:35–12:25	Individual Planning
—	12:25–1:10	Individual Time or Lunch With Core Partner*	Individual Time or Lunch With Core Partner* or Yard Duty**	Individual Time or Lunch With Core Partner*	Individual Time or Lunch With Whole School Staff*	—	12:25–1:05	Individual Time or Lunch With Core Partner*
3	1:10–2:00	Engineering & Humanities	Math	Engineering & Humanities	Math	3	1:05–1:30	Advisory
	2:00–3:00		Core Team Planning	Core Team Planning	1:30–1:45		Break	
					1:45–4:00		Staff Inquiry and Core Team	

* Optional
 ** Alternate Tuesdays

Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) block period to make way for additional guided reading. The core teachers, however, were reluctant to break up this block. One explained that for the STEAM classes, much time went into setting up the activities, and at least one whole block period a week was necessary to provide students with sufficient time for inquiry and discovery.

Challenges in Using Block Periods. The utility afforded by block periods came with some drawbacks. One teacher noted that though the block periods allowed students to complete extended building projects and laboratory experiments, if absent those periods, it could be difficult to find time for students to catch up.

Another teacher explained that staying on task for a whole block period was a challenge for students in the grades she taught. To navigate this challenge, she would divide the block into two regular-length periods for some tasks or give students the opportunity to move around or outside the classroom.

A further challenge was arranging scheduling for special education. Some SMASH students had occasions in which they needed to step out of class for one-on-one work on specific goals with a special education teacher as part of their IEPs. However, teachers neither wanted students to miss project time during block periods nor to regularly miss the same class every week, as each of these scenarios made it difficult to catch up. With each core creating its own schedule, there was no clear alignment across subjects or grades. Thus, special education scheduling required considerable negotiation with teachers across all cores to make sure that adequate time could be arranged to meet students' individual learning needs under both their IEPs and in-class learning goals.

Single Periods for Some Subjects. Although a main feature of core schedules at SMASH, block periods were not used for all subjects. Mathematics was a salient exception, taught at grade level and in shorter periods. One teacher explained that he and his core had previously experimented with mathematics in multi-age block periods, but this experience had convinced them that single periods worked better for Core 4 mathematics classes:

I used to teach math in block, and that was way too long... We used to teach math as [a] mixed grade level. One of the things we found out is that it was really hard to meet everybody's needs, because there's not only the different levels in the algebra, but there's other different levels in the seventh-grade math... I think that's one of the things we learned about some of the drawbacks of the schedule, that math can't be part of that big block mixed group.

This experience was indicative of the flexibility available to teaching staff as well as the tendency for the schedule to be shaped and developed over time. Each core could

try scheduling classes in new ways, learn from that experience, and make changes to the schedule to best suit student strengths, interests, and needs.

P.E. was another subject often taught in grade-level classes and for single periods. Single-class periods, such as mathematics and P.E., provided flexibility within the block scheduling for teachers to have individual planning times. In Core 4, for example, individual planning took place on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays while the grade-level class was at P.E. and the core teacher partner was with her grade-level mathematics class.

Advisory Periods—Social and Emotional Learning

A second common element across core schedules is advisory periods. In Cores 1–3, advisory periods occur for 30 minutes daily at the start of each day; in Core 4, advisory periods are scheduled Monday through Thursday, in the 15 minutes before lunch, followed by an Advisory game before release on Friday afternoons.

A key purpose of advisory periods is to provide dedicated time for the school’s social and emotional learning curriculum, although social and emotional learning at SMASH is also woven throughout the curriculum. SMASH employs a program known as Responsive Classroom, with all teachers in the school trained in its use. The curriculum aims to improve students’ facility in applying the main principles of the program: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control (CARES).¹

As with block periods, each core and teacher adapts advisory periods in different ways to support student growth and development. During a visit to SMASH, we observed a Core 2 advisory period, beginning at 8:30am. The teacher stood at the door greeting each student individually. The class began with a “moment of mindfulness.” Students were seated on chairs set out in a rectangle around the edge of a mat at the front of the classroom, clapping their hands together and raising them up and down as they breathed deeply several times. This was followed by greetings in which, one by one, students turned to make eye contact while greeting a neighboring student by name, and then followed by a “share,” in which students shared with the group something of interest or something that was exciting to them that day.

This activity then transitioned into a shared reading activity. A piece of text was shown on the projection screen at the front of the classroom. The teacher modeled a reading of the text for the students, who then read and enacted in groups sections of the text before moving to the adjacent classroom for the first period of the day—”STEAM.” The use of shared reading to transition from the social and emotional

¹ Further information on the program may be found at <https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/>.

curriculum into the academic curriculum is emblematic of the flexibility available to core teachers to organize learning time in a way that meets their students' strengths, interests, and needs.

Field Trips

An aim of the school is to develop globally and community-connected students, and thus a feature of the way time is organized at SMASH is that each core undertakes many field trips. During the week of our site visit in November 2016, three of the four cores took at least one field trip. These included visits to the California Science Center to learn about digital animation, to a nonprofit organization that provides employment for former gang members, and to a lagoon to observe different species of birds. Sometimes outside speakers were brought to the school in place of field trips, with a local congressman having recently visited.

As discussed below, these outside learning opportunities shape the way that teachers spend time together at the school, given the significant amount of coordination required to help these experiences better support the growth and development of the students.

Teachers Constructing Teaching Schedules at SMASH

A key underlying principle in the use of time at SMASH is flexibility. This was mentioned by all nine teachers and the principal and was a theme to which teachers frequently returned in discussing the way time was organized at the school. Part of the reason that SMASH teachers are able to flexibly use time is the autonomy that they have in its allocation. Each teacher pair (or trio in Core 1) is empowered to develop their own schedules, which they then bring to the principal for discussion and confirmation.

The process of schedule creation is reflective of SMASH's "social contract" with staff. Although intended primarily for staff inquiry sessions (discussed below), the social contract also serves as a guide for staff interactions more generally. Negotiated each year by all school staff, it sets out the main principles of communication: "communicate productively," "maintain balance," and "exercise thoughtful intentions." The social contract encourages teachers to "consider ideas through the lens of each Core and the school as a whole."

Schedule creation takes place during the summer, ahead of each school year. Teachers must work within certain constraints. For one, recess and lunch times are the same for all cores. In addition, music classes are taught by instructors from the district, who rotate among the other schools in the area. SMASH's schedule for music is thus set by the district, and teachers in each core must plan their schedules around these fixed slots.

A further constraint is P.E. Not all SMASH classes can be out on the school field at the same time, and as the school is co-located with another elementary school, classes must be coordinated. Although core teachers have some say—with most, but not all, teachers preferring P.E. in the afternoons—final decisions on P.E. schedules were made by the principal.

Beyond these constraints, teachers in each core negotiate to determine the allocation of time that works best for their students, while being mindful of other requirements, such as district guidelines for the number of instructional minutes in literacy and numeracy and teaching contracts that establish weekly teacher preparation periods.

A look at how one core's teachers negotiated their schedule illustrates how the school philosophy and values intersect with teachers' desire to collaborate to improve capacity, while centered on student learning. These teachers, who were working together for the first time, began with a discussion of shared values. One teacher noted,

I think one of the foundation pieces is that [my colleague] and I spent a lot of time before the summer and into the summer discussing our philosophy. We built a common understanding of what we value and where we feel our attention is most necessary. With that foundation, I think it is critical for any educator, whether they have a partner or not, to be very clear and open with themselves about what they value, what's a priority, and how they're going to spend their time.

Then the important elements of the social and emotional curriculum, and blocks for project-based learning and learning beyond the classroom were scheduled:

We looked for chunks of time to design our schedule. Because we have from 8:30 to 10:15 in the morning, every day, we're here in the classroom, we don't have P.E., [so] we always start with a morning meeting. From 8:30 to 9:15, every day is social curriculum, but we also embed shared reading.

Our priority was giving writing the time it needed and STEM the time it needed. But in order for STEM to work well, I need to have at least 1 day where I have them for a large chunk of time because we're engaging in building things.

Play is critical to us, so 2 hours of our week are dedicated to play beyond. On Mondays, we have what we call "choice choices" or outdoor learning time. Either we stay here and give them choices and their job is to find new friends to collaborate with, and/or we go out to different parks and we spend 2 hours outdoors, playing.

The other core teacher described the process as a compromise between the many learning opportunities they would like to provide for students and external constraints:

[My colleague] stuck it on the board and we talked it out and said, “Would this go here? How much time do we need for this? If this goes here, what does that compromise with that?” We literally were using the board for a while...

Another thing that’s tricky is there are so many different things we’re trying to incorporate aside from our own vision. “Okay, we have to have library. What are [the librarian’s] free slots? We have to do this. Music’s happening at this time. We have [our instructional aide] this time, so those are better for reading stations than other times.” First our philosophy, and then the constraints of reality. Then [the principal] would come in and bring us down to real reality, and we would say, “Well, let us just try what we want to try to an extent.”

The role of the principal in discussing and finalizing schedules was two-fold. First, she was able to help align schedules both with the shared facilities with the neighboring school and across cores. For example, for all teachers to have access to the school’s literacy coach, care was taken where possible to avoid cores scheduling literacy blocks at the same time. Second, the principal helped teachers reflect on and apply learnings from the previous year, such as times that worked well with community partners. She also noted that schedules could be adjusted based on student learning needs:

Even when they’re moving from one core to another, there’s a very thoughtful plan that goes from the handing off team to the receiving team. We know the personalities and needs of the group of kids coming in, so we make schedule changes around that. Sometimes you’ll have a cohort of kids who are more anxious about math, so you want to do that at their most grounded time of day. Sometimes you have a group of kids who have a hard time sitting still in their body, so you want to make sure that you have lots of movement breaks, and P.E. will be adjusted accordingly, so it’s not too close to break and lunch. Teachers are really actively thinking about...the group of kids that they know really well and what they need.

The way that learning time is apportioned for different subjects, in addition to meeting student needs and the requirements of external factors, is a function of the relative strengths and interests of the teachers. In the case of one core, the teachers had complementary teaching capabilities, with one having trained in the sciences, and the other with a background in literacy. This meant that the pair could switch

student groups between science/engineering and humanities/literacy, allowing them to teach the same lesson to each of the two groups:

On Monday and Wednesday, I teach math first. Then after break I teach one section of engineering until lunch, and then after lunch I teach another section of engineering until they go home. Then on Tuesday [and] Thursday, I teach one section of science in the morning before break, and then I teach the other section of science to the other half of the class after break.

Challenges in Schedule Creation. In contrast to planning time for teachers with distinct capabilities, designing schedules that blended subjects could be challenging in cases where teachers had similar skill sets. In one core, the teachers were working together for the first time: one with a strong background in literacy and the other with many years of experience in social studies. To complicate matters, the teachers initially disagreed on the number of block periods to be created. Building the schedule highlighted both the flexibility available to teachers and the negotiation and compromise in establishing a plan that works for each. As one teacher noted,

I'm the one [who said], "I want the double blocks." If I only have an hour, which by the time you transition ends up being about 50 minutes, that's not enough time to get reading and writing in. If you were to split it evenly you're talking 25 minutes of reading and 25 minutes of writing. That's just not enough time. By the time you give your mini-lesson, you send them off, they're going to have 15 minutes to try it. We negotiated, and I helped [my partner] think about how she could use her two-hour block.

Her teaching partner felt strongly about the need for allowing students to move around and initially resisted the two-hour block schedule:

It was a bit of negotiation. This is our first year together. What she had done with her old partner 2 years ago is they had just one group of kids all the time for 7 weeks. Then they would switch and teach the same thing. I just feel like the kids want to mix more and move between classes at this age. She gave in for that. Then I was like, "Okay, we can do the double block."

Ultimately, they were able to use the schedule flexibly to accommodate each of their preferences:

I feel like we both agreed that this would be the consistent schedule [of] double blocks knowing that [in those] weeks where we had a field trip or weeks that we had special speakers, that we would both be

willing to negotiate and make single blocks if we needed to. That was our negotiation, which I think has been successful. I pushed back on the [amount of] time on field trips, because that's a lot of instructional time out. We negotiated on that end, too.

Effective working relationships between staff members, and a voice in what and how they teach, is part of what makes the scheduling process work for teachers, and ultimately for students, at SMASH. One teacher characterized it as follows:

[Having a] teaching partner is like being married. You really have to be open to negotiation and compromise and communicating, and it's good practice for interpersonal skills. It's going well this year. I feel like we've negotiated enough things [that] we both feel we're getting as much time as we can with the kids.

Teacher Learning

Time, Space, and Teacher Learning

Scheduled times for teacher collaboration is an important feature of the organization of time at SMASH. The school’s approach to learning informs the way that these teacher collaboration and learning times are used, with an emphasis on building strong personal relationships to strengthen professional relationships. Thus, time is constructed to facilitate both formal and informal interactions among teachers. This includes common planning time within each core, professional learning as a whole staff, biannual learning walks, and regular lunchtime conversations. In addition, the physical layout of the school permits a considerable amount of informal teacher collaboration that further supports teaching and learning. The principal described the rationale for the allocation of time for teacher collaboration:

We all deeply ascribe to social learning theory—that your most dynamic and most powerful learning happens when you have moments [not just] when you think and write and reflect, but when you share those “AHAs” with other people and have feedback. It doesn’t matter what your age—that’s where the most powerful and innovative things happen.

As with other uses of time, time for teacher collaboration takes place differently across each core, although each schedule contains space for both individual and common planning time. In one core, for example, this equated to three 50-minute periods of individual preparation time and two 1-hour periods of common planning with the teaching partner, taken during student music periods on Tuesdays and Thursdays. In addition, there are 2 hours and 15 minutes of staff learning time on Friday afternoons, used alternately for whole staff inquiry time and flexibly for additional common planning, meetings with special education teachers or mathematics/literacy coaches, or professional learning time within cores.

Common Planning Time at SMASH

Common planning time at SMASH is dedicated time, usually once or twice a week, in which teachers can meet with their core teaching partner(s). In most cases, these were scheduled periods—often when students from both grades within a core were at music and/or P.E. —although in the case of Core 1, this involved one extended period that overlapped with a lunch period. Teachers from all four cores indicated that they did not establish fixed agendas for their meetings but used these sessions flexibly to discuss issues as needed. However, topics discussed during common planning time typically included checking in on progress with

curricula, talking about individual students, logistics (known as “nuts and bolts”), and communication with parents.

Given the large number of out-of-school learning experiences and field trips, discussion of logistics and preparation was critical for providing these opportunities. Eight of nine teachers said that organization and scheduling were usual elements of their common planning time, with seven of nine teachers mentioning field trip preparation. During our visit, we observed one core planning an overnight trip to Santa Catalina Island. The teachers dedicated some of the conversation to the different options for student pairings for activities during the day as well as groups for sleeping arrangements. Considerable thought was given to these arrangements to enable productive working partnerships among students during the trip. Moreover, the arrangements reflected the deep knowledge that teachers had of their students strength and weaknesses, in both cognitive and social and emotional domains.

Seven of nine teachers also said that common planning time was used for discussing individual students and their progress. The time could be focused on particular student successes or on students who were having difficulties. As all teachers within a core typically saw all children daily, teachers could use common planning time to compare observations and collect information to devise teaching strategies, provide feedback on lesson plans, or communicate with parents.

The flexible approach taken to common planning meetings allowed teachers to surface urgent or important issues, as one teacher noted in discussing a recent student success in mathematics:

Today our planning will be around literacy so it will be informal... but I'm going to focus on the child who had this experience [this morning], because today I have his IEP. This is very critical information, what happened here today. [My teaching partner] needs to know that happened. In fact, it's a child in her advisory so she needs to know what happened around his perseverance and grit. It will be informal because we don't have a time [allocated for this] and it needs to be shared today.

Communication with parents was another frequent element of common planning time, with eight of nine teachers saying they used common planning time preparing for meetings with, or sending emails to, parents. This included the process for parent conferences, the kind of information teachers wanted to prepare for and request from parents, the best language with which to communicate, and any specific issues to raise with parents. As an example, four of nine teachers we interviewed said that they often used common planning time to discuss responding to parent emails. This included comparing observations of students and learning strategies as well as choosing the right language with which to respond. As one teacher explained,

If I think something's a good idea I'd like to run it by someone else who I trust...my partner being one of them... "Does this sound good? Want to make sure it sounds okay." [We] bounce ideas off each other. Just messages that go off to parents because we send a lot of emails. It's a small enough school that we can be in constant contact with parents about how their kids are doing. I wouldn't want to send something out to a parent before someone else looked at it.

Teachers at SMASH kept close contact with parents. For example, the school was testing "mathfulness" sessions, in which parents were invited to participate in mathematics classes with their students. This aimed to help parents understand the ways that mathematics instruction today might differ from their own experiences and to help them better support student learning. Each core also provided notes on activities for compiling in the school's weekly newsletter to parents.

We also observed parents informally dropping in on classrooms to chat with teachers or participate in class. As one teacher commented, "I'll take any parent who will come." Another explained that the multi-age structure of the cores gave greater opportunity for teachers to form relationships with students and families:

We love our students and our 3-year relationship that we have with them, so we really use each other as resources as we're discussing kids and families and relationships working with parents... We can have those dialogues for that 3-year relationship. [And] often we'll have parents for multiple cycles.

The Use of Time During Common Planning. During our visit, we observed a common planning session with Core 1. Teachers in the core noted that they didn't have a set agenda for each of their meetings but that there were some common elements. In this session, teachers had previously agreed to talk about student progress in mathematics, and two teachers brought examples of student work to share. The session was loosely structured around the sharing of student successes, teaching challenges, administrative matters, and planning for professional learning.

The meeting began with one teacher sharing observations of the development of several students' mathematical reasoning. A student had exhibited the use of four different strategies in approaching a problem, including estimation and a number line. This use of multiple representations reflected a success for the student, and the teacher intended to use this example to model multiple representations for others in the class. Another student's line of growth was identifying where he was getting stuck and asking for help—something the student had previously been reluctant to do.

Another teacher shared that she had used the 50th day of school as a touchstone for the lesson. Working with the "greater than" and "less than" symbols, she reflected

on students' excitement at their realization that 44 and 56 were each the same number of steps from 50 on a number line.

A third teacher brought along a short video he had recorded of a student interaction for discussion highlighting a teaching challenge. The teacher noted that the student was from a bilingual background and thus used two languages in his mathematical thinking. The short video showed the student sharing his reasoning around a mathematical problem in class, but with difficulties in articulating that reasoning. This observation led teachers to discuss potential strategies, including seating the student next to a peer who could support the student's language development.

The teachers then transitioned to some administrative work, discussing a "504 plan" (an individualized in-class learning program) for one student, followed by a discussion of the language they should use with students during an upcoming lockdown drill. They also planned for a future meeting to discuss *Running Records* in assessing student literacy.

The meeting concluded with the teachers discussing incorporating professional learning into their practices. They talked about a video of a teacher who had described his or her professional learning during the transition from a Montessori to a Reggio Emilia environment, noting that professional learning often involves incorporating relevant elements into one's teaching practice, and possibly rejecting others, while also being mindful of the schedule and resource implications of making shifts in one's teaching practice.

Staff Inquiry Time

A salient feature of teacher collaboration at SMASH is staff inquiry time, in which all K–8 teaching staff across the school, including teaching aides, meet as a whole staff. Students are given early release on Friday afternoons, allowing time for an extended (2¼ hours) professional learning session.

Staff inquiry is also made possible with the "banking" of time, in which by agreement, SMASH staff can consolidate three contractually guaranteed 90-minute monthly staff development sessions into two 2¼-hour sessions. Generally, two out of four Fridays each month are whole-staff sessions (around 18 a year), while the remaining Fridays are used for additional meetings among core teachers or meeting with other staff such as instructional aides or special education teachers as necessary.

Staff inquiry times have a common but flexible structure, with teachers having input into the topics for discussion. Across the year, the sessions return to a common theme. In 2015–2016, the theme was science, with professional learning during these sessions related to scientific inquiry. The previous year's theme had been mindfulness, which included all staff doing readings from a common textbook. The year prior to that, the theme had been reading comprehension.

Mindfulness had been retained as a recurring element during 2016–2017, with exercises in mindfulness now incorporated into staff inquiry time. A second element was “exploring materials,” giving teachers the opportunity to participate in and experience a hands-on learning activity, which could include discussions of pedagogy. A third element was intentional relationship-building activities and staff celebrations.

Staff inquiry time provided an opportunity for whole staff discussion and to explore connections across cores. One such thematic discussion for 2016–2017 was mapping out mathematics progressions across the grades, with one teacher noting how exploration of ramps in kindergarten eventually progressed to concepts of slopes in eighth-grade algebra.

The Use of Time During Staff Inquiry. During a visit to SMASH, we observed a staff inquiry session. Teacher learning at the meeting was oriented around the same elements that the school sought to foster in their students, such as mindfulness and hands-on and collaborative learning. Moreover, the approach taken to the session appeared designed for teachers to experience these learning opportunities from a student perspective first, before then discussing how activities might be incorporated into their practice. The staff inquiry time also highlighted the intersection between social and emotional and academic learning at the school.

The session began at 1:45pm with teachers briefly gathering to take their picture for a Facebook page. An attendance sheet was passed around, and the staff quickly sat to participate in a short mindfulness exercise, in which teachers sat with eyes closed, listening to a 5-minute guided meditation. As the recording ended, one teacher immediately began a description of a hands-on activity for staff. At each of the many low circular tables in the K–2 classroom were cardboard rectangles, small mounds of clay, water for smoothing, and implements for cutting, carving, and shaping. Staff moved across the room to a high rectangular table featuring a range of objects drawn from the environment: feathers, shells, an ear of corn, a sprouting sweet potato, wood, leaves, and small rocks. Teachers were asked to select an object with which to render a representation from clay (see Figure 2).

This activity extended from one that the teachers had undertaken during a professional learning program on “Constructing a Pedagogy of Play” that the whole teaching staff had attended the previous summer. As they worked with the clay, teachers were asked to reflect on the following questions:

- What did you notice about the object you chose to render? (Is it complex or simple or both?)
- What was your experience of the process of sculpting? How might this give you a window into a child’s experience?

- How does it help you understand the affordances of this material versus another, such as drawing?

After around 20 minutes, the teachers were encouraged to take a “museum walk” to observe the different renderings while sharing their collective thoughts on the questions. The responses evoked reflections on student learning in the school:

“The process of sculpting was engaging for me: I didn’t feel left out if I wasn’t chatting [while working.]”

“I thought about revision. I could revise my work.”

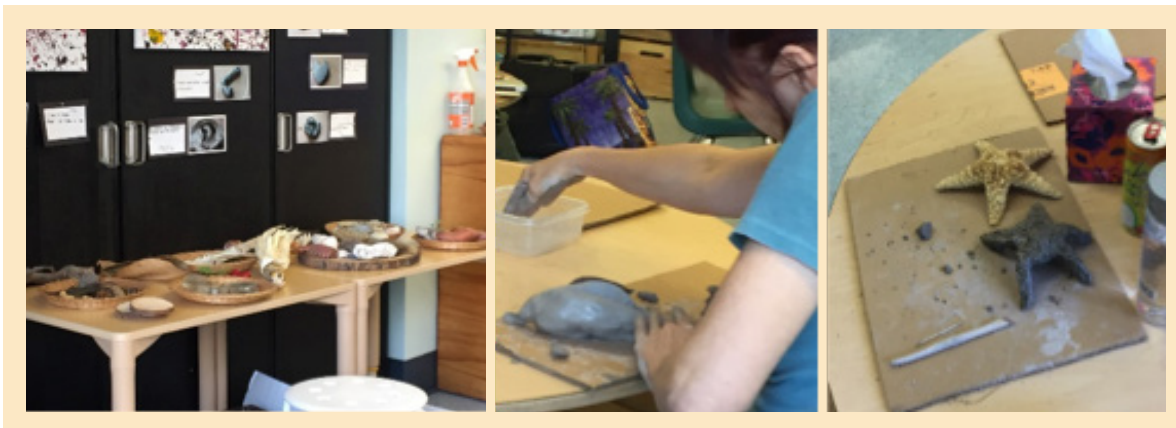
“I’ve been working with clay [in my class] for the past two weeks. It’s great for engaging students and focusing on details.”

The museum walk transitioned into a mini-lesson, led by one teacher, on several forms of thinking maps. Using an overhead projector, the teacher reviewed flow maps, sequencing maps, and bubble maps for her colleagues to highlight the different ways of conceptualizing parts of a whole or the stages/substages of a process (see Figure 3). Examples included the process for constructing a text or elaborating an argument.

Teachers spent about 12 minutes developing their own maps of the stages of the clay activity—selecting materials, shaping, adding details—before sharing with the group. The school principal then led a group discussion of how these conceptualizations relate to mathematics content and other learning contexts, noting that deeper learning for students occurs when they can reflect on their processes and allow other students to make connections.

Teachers commented not only on what they did during the hands-on clay molding activity but also on what they were thinking and feeling, and they extrapolated this

FIGURE 2. HANDS-ON ACTIVITY DURING STAFF INQUIRY TIME AT SMASH



to implications for teaching and learning. For example, one teacher noted that she had to try to be comfortable with what she felt was an unfinished product from the activity. Describing the flow map activity, another teacher said,

“Being conscious of my own process allowed me to think of how a student might think and what steps they might need [for an activity].”

Discussions of pedagogy were collegial yet robust, with teachers challenging each other on how to effectively implement resources in their teaching. In a discussion of the clay rendering activity, one teacher questioned how students might be incentivized to improve upon their rendered objects. This stimulated a conversation of the role of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivations for students and how this might vary depending on the age of students across cores as well as the individual interests of students.

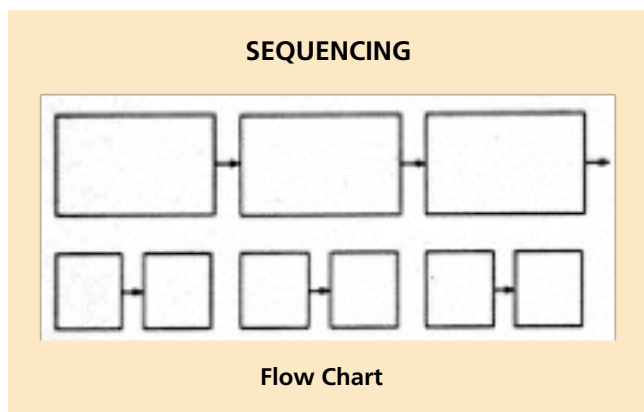
In a discussion of the flow map activity, one teacher noted how his colleague had appended feelings to each of the actions in each step and that this could be usefully incorporated as part of the writers’ workshop. Another teacher commented that making processes explicit may be uncomfortable at first and persistence with an activity may be needed for some students. The principal added that one must be intentional in the incorporation of any resource if it is to transform one’s teaching practice.

At 3:15pm, the group transitioned from hands-on and pedagogical activities to team-building. The group watched a 6-minute TedX video that re-characterized leadership as a series of small “lollipop moments” in which individuals create and acknowledge everyday actions that improve the lives of others. Teachers were then asked to write a message acknowledging someone in the room who has positively impacted their life.

For the final 15 minutes, the group huddled together for a birthday circle where teachers shared a short story or affirmation of support for the teacher whose birthday it was. Recalling a recent occasion when the staff went to sing karaoke, the stories and affirmations were then spontaneously sung in the style of songs from that night, eliciting laughter from the teachers as the meeting ended.

The intentional relationship-building activities during staff inquiry time also served an important pedagogical purpose. Teachers were able to ask each

FIGURE 3. SAMPLE FLOW MAP



other direct questions and readily challenge each other's opinions. The collegial atmosphere meant that conversations remained focused on teaching and learning, without being received as criticism of a particular teacher or teachers.

Learning Walks

A regular part of the school calendar at SMASH is time set aside for learning walks (also known as instructional rounds). These take place on 2 days each year, one each semester in literacy and mathematics. Learning walks at SMASH involve hiring substitute teachers for four of the eight teachers for a morning, with other teachers moving together with the principal in small groups in and out of classrooms, observing teaching, taking observational notes, and holding hallway conversations to compare observations. Feedback is then provided to teachers to help inform instruction. The groups then switch, and a similar process is conducted the following day for the classes of the other half of the staff.

Information from learning walks informed topics for discussion at staff inquiry times and in individual lesson planning. Four of nine teachers indicated that the learning walks had brought to light useful observations on student learning. For example, one teacher noted how a former student had transferred skills from the class into work in higher grades:

From the learning walk, we had something that came up for a staff [member] who is wondering how students are using the buildups and tools while doing math work and... are they letting go of them too early? I saw one student that I know really well using manipulatives in a really interesting way where he didn't need to, but he built something in order to push past [a sticking point]. The building part was strictly for him, but he used that in order to figure out the next step of the problem.

We had questions around how long are kids using manipulatives: can we have them use them longer in order to push their own mathematical thinking forward into more 3-D type of worlds? What I've been noticing is no matter how many ways and times I model using manipulatives to count, other students [must also] model, because really students socialize other children.

Principals from other schools were also invited to take learning walks at SMASH on a handful of occasions following district principals' meetings. This provided a further opportunity for the school to receive feedback on student learning and to familiarize others in the district with the different organization, approach to learning, and use of time at the school.

Teacher Professional Learning and Development Conversations

In addition to the teacher learning that took place during common planning and staff inquiry times, all teachers had time set aside for one-on-one meetings with the principal focused on their own professional learning. The meetings are calendared by the principal in the summer ahead of the school year, with meetings taking place about every 3 weeks, usually 12 times a year. These principal-teacher meetings were not formal teacher evaluations, but rather were focused on individual learning goals. The school's principal described the process as one beginning with teacher reflection, self-evaluation, and the collection of evidence if needed:

“What kind of goals [do] I want to work on, and what kinds of strengths am I building on?” When I check in, in those one-on-one meetings, I’m saying, “Okay, what are your latest strengths that you’re cultivating, that you want to mark the moment for yourself, that you’ve grown in and then bring to my attention, because maybe I haven’t seen it?” Then I’m asking about how do you know and in what ways have you moved toward your goal? “[Is] there something you want me to actually come observe related to that?”

The principal said that regular meetings with teachers also allowed them to celebrate recent successes and discuss particular student learning needs or concerns. Additionally, meetings provided an opportunity to draw connections between individual teacher learning goals and school-wide teacher learning:

We have a staff inquiry plan. We set steps and agreements about what we’re going to practice and come back together there as a whole staff, and how we’re going to move together as a whole staff. The one-on-one meetings are more about your individual continuum of what you need or want to work on. It can be related to where we’re growing as a whole staff, but it doesn’t have to be. It’s differentiated. We always want to move as a whole staff, but then not everybody comes with the same strengths and needs. We want to make sure we have an individualized plan for where the adult needs to fill out their portfolio of strengths.

An outcome of these meetings is opportunities for teacher professional development. Each teacher at SMASH is allocated the equivalent of 4 days a year where his or her class can be taught by a substitute teacher (“sub days”). These sub days can be used flexibly by the teacher depending on his or her needs. In some cases, teachers use sub days within the school to provide time to assess students one on one or observe another teacher’s class; in other cases, teachers may choose to attend a seminar or workshop, sometimes attending in pairs.

Informal Teacher Collaboration

Lunchtimes for Relationship Building and Student Talk. A unique feature of the way that time is organized at SMASH is the way in which the school facilitates informal collaboration among teachers, including shared lunchtimes for each core. Regular lunchtime meetings are a part of the shared norms and culture at the school, with each core typically meeting several times a week during lunch periods, even though not obligated to do so. During lunchtime meetings, teachers in each core can relax, converse, and build personal relationships. One core, however, used the time as additional common planning time. One teacher noted that in a traditional school setting, lunchtimes are often used as individual preparation periods:

[At] my old placement, I would work through lunches and it could be detrimental to the relationship I'm having with my colleagues. Not that we didn't have a great relationship, but we were both parallel talking ... We'd both be talking, sorting papers, making things. It wasn't really a time to just sit and think deeply about what we're doing or our personal lives, which is, I think in a lot of ways equally as important when you're working with students all day to have a chance to just talk about yourself.

The same teacher noted that, although intended specifically for growing relationships, informal lunchtime meetings often turned to school matters and provided additional opportunities for teachers to discuss student work and teaching:

We talk about our own lives, but we end up talking about students and what we're doing in our classrooms all the time... I'm going to guess 50% to 80% of the conversation is usually around something related to students or school.

In addition to lunches with core teaching partners, on Thursdays, lunchtime was designated as an opportunity for classroom teachers from all four cores to meet informally and build relationships across cores. This was made possible by the principal and instructional aides covering lunchtime yard duty, with one teacher noting,

I think that social community part that we're here together, that we're responsible for each other, that is a key part of what works. We're smaller so you can know everybody, that also helps. Structurally, yes, there has to be time so, the administrator has to give time for teachers to be able to meet together, even unofficial time. Like Thursday lunches, [the principal] makes sure that nobody has lunch duty so, ... [you] don't have to, but we all have lunch together and it's more social, but it also can be a place where a teacher can make an announcement.

School Layout and Informal Collaboration. Four of nine teachers we interviewed said that the physical layout of the school also facilitated valuable opportunities for informal collaboration. Each of the cores consists of adjacent classrooms. In three of the four cores, classrooms are separated by flexible sliding partitions, while the fourth has opposite-facing classrooms across a walkway with doors that typically remain open. This arrangement allows students to transition from one class to another but also affords moments in which teachers can share notes, observations, or check in on various matters. One teacher noted,

Because of the physical set-up, it at least allows the teachers to physically be close. There's an accordion wall so it's easy to communicate... If I need to talk to him about something real quick, it's easy to touch base at break or at lunch.

Another teacher noted,

With an adjoining door, you can open up and pop in even if you just need to make eye contact and see another adult for a minute to empathize with you, or just to laugh something off and be able to move on with your day... I think the physical space makes a huge difference. Because when you are self-contained physically, you're emotionally self-contained as well.

Time, Teacher Learning, and Student Learning

The organization of teacher time and work at SMASH supported student learning in several salient ways that included addressing individual student strengths, interests, and needs; adapting instructional strategies; and developing a deep understanding of students.

Time to Address Individual Students

Time for teacher collaboration at SMASH afforded opportunities to address individual student strengths, interests, and needs, as well as devise strategies to promote growth and development. Four of nine teachers said they looked for patterns in behavior across classes when discussing individual students with colleagues, and seven of nine teachers said that they worked with colleagues to devise strategies for individual student needs. One teacher described the process she and her colleague used as follows:

Because we don't teach, other than reading, the same curriculum, when we sit down to look at a child's work, we are looking at it from the perspective of, there's a challenge ... What is happening in processing, what is happening with the skill foundation? Is there something happening at home? Is there a pattern? Is this something new? What changes in our environment have happened? Is there anything new that we don't know happening in their life? We start trying to collect as many pieces of the puzzle to create a full picture, the whole movie, to make a movie in our mind. Then, from that conversation, we come up with a plan for how to proceed. Whether it is we contact their family, let's have a student success team meeting, or let's collect more data or whatever it might be that is necessary.

Moreover, collaboration time allowed teachers to learn from each other and share their expertise in different areas to shape their response to specific challenges:

[There are] a lot of examples I can give you of how I've benefited and my [teaching] practice has improved. There is a student in [my class] who has a particular special need. That's not necessarily an area of expertise for me. I'm still a learner in the way that he needs help. Being able to talk to the others in my core who do have experience with that has completely changed my dialogue, my language, my boundaries, and how I motivate that child.

In working with the other teachers and getting their feedback, I've been able to take their suggestions and apply them to my work with a

number of children that I'm working with right now who have boundary needs, social learning needs, language needs, and motivational needs. Being able to talk to them and actually strategize and get very concrete examples of how to communicate with these particular children has been very helpful, and I have seen a difference for sure.

The engagement of teachers in student learning experiences during staff inquiry and student talk during common planning times allows teachers to develop a deeper understanding of students and how best to engage them. This is further aided by the looping of students with teachers over 2 years, in which teachers are better able to know students' prior knowledge as well as areas of strength and difficulties. As one teacher described,

It is a team model so that children have many different adults to connect with and relate to... Even though we teach 50 kids, the idea of this means that we know all the kids, K through eight in a very intimate way.

The fact that we loop with them means that we don't have to return to zero every time the new school year rolls around... The colleagues, their innovativeness, and the foundational piece of the social and emotional curriculum really rooting the school, and the fact that we're all on the same page in terms of that philosophy, I think is very unique, and really provides a whole child experience, so that children's needs are honored and respected.

Each of these uses of teacher collaborative time to discuss student needs served to create an environment of belonging for students, which research indicates can support academic behaviors and engagement in learning (Cohen & Garcia, 2008; Osterman, 2000).

Teacher Collaboration Leads to New Instructional Strategies

At SMASH, collaboration time allows teachers to draw on one another's differing expertise. During interviews, six of nine teachers discussed how, as a result of collaboration with a partner, they had adapted their teaching in their core. For example, one teacher described how she had used her experience as a literacy instructor and introduced student reading logs to the core. Her core teaching partner suggested they further interrogate the purpose of the reading logs: "Okay, let's talk about this for a second. What's the purpose of the reading log? We want to know what they read over the year, so how can we make it the most real-life experience?" This led to them instead starting a blog for the students. The blog enabled the class to not only apply their learning in a new way but also enabled the teachers to more clearly see the differences in writing abilities between the two grades within the core and bet-

ter understand students' learning progression. In addition, teachers found that when students commented on one another's blogs, it encouraged peer mentorship. The teacher noted,

We [also] add comments, but it's such a natural way for us to do all the foundational skills of grammar, but also embed it in depth. For me, that's a perfect example of how our social dynamic takes our teaching and learning to a different component. I would like to think that I do that for her, that there's reciprocity with my areas of expertise.

This teacher characterized her relationship with the other teacher as a freeing experience, one that allowed her the space to concentrate her energies on areas in which she was passionate, such as STEAM, knowing that she had a teaching partner who was knowledgeable in literacy and willing to provide her with support in that area when needed.

Another SMASH teacher described how she had spent considerable time organizing her class into pairs and small groups, based on factors such as mathematics ability and compatibility. By contrast, her core teaching partner had recently given every child a class list and asked students to work with a different partner each day. As a result of their collaboration, she has begun experimenting with this method as way to create new working pairs and to develop greater community in the class.

Enabling Conditions That Facilitate the Organization of Teacher Time and Work

The organization of time at SMASH has helped develop a model that gives priority to relationships and social interactions in support of experiential and collaborative learning. This is supported by several interdependent factors.

Philosophy

SMASH has a clear set of principles around which it organizes teaching and learning, and these provide anchor points for decisions about how time is allocated in the school. The multi-age classrooms, emphasis on activities connected to the real world, Reggio Emilia–inspired philosophy of children having voice in constructing their learning, creative exploration and social learning as part of the process, and projects that last several weeks necessitates open learning spaces with several different zones through which students can move as well as time for hands-on learning and discovery, which drives the use of longer teaching blocks as a core element of the schedule. The school’s emphasis on social and emotional learning also directs the use of time within that structure, with attention to developing students’ social and emotional competencies and facilitating positive working relationships among students.

The school philosophy also provides a touchstone for decisions on teacher collaboration. Teachers require adequate time together in cores to facilitate logistics for the out-of-school learning trips and to share notes on individual students to reflect on and guide their growth.

This approach to teaching and learning also helps shape the way whole-staff collaborations are organized, with an emphasis on mirroring the same learning approach taken with students to the learning of adults. This means creating blocks of time for staff inquiry in which teachers can engage in hands-on activities and learn in a social fashion with peers.

District Flexibility

The innovative use of time at SMASH is facilitated in part by leeway created at the district level. This was more a matter of operational flexibility than one of resourcing. Like other schools in the district, SMASH receives an allocation of Title II teacher professional development funding as well as some funding from the Santa Monica-Malibu Education Foundation, a nonprofit organization that supports public schools in the district. These funds were contributed towards staff time, such as substitute teachers during learning walks, and an instructional assistant position,

respectively. However, SMASH did not receive disproportionately more resources than other district schools to support the use of time. Rather, three of ten respondents reported a level of understanding at the district level of school goals and the way in which SMASH operated to achieve them. As described by one teacher who participated in district committees:

Just knowing that the district supports our work I think psychologically is a big deal. It's not like we're the rogue school with the charter doing our own thing. We know that at some schools they do very similar work. Our work is different in other ways, but that there's still this overlap. There is a level of district support.

The principal described how regular contact with the district had helped establish positive relationships and trust with district stakeholders:

We have a lot of School Board, Superintendent's Cabinet, and Ed Services support. They'll tell us what the non-negotiables are, what the tight parts are, and then they totally trust us to be intentional with the pieces that can be flexible to meet our needs... We invite people to do learning walks here with us... There's lots of contact time to make sure that they know what's happening and how it's happening even if it's different.

One useful flexibility was the ability of all schools in the district to “bank” time. SMASH did so by combining three contractually provided, 90-minute staff development periods into two extended periods. Schools within the district are also able to designate “late start” or “early release” days. These have allowed SMASH to create the extended staff inquiry session, during its Friday early release days, and to write these into teacher contracts. The school also had some flexibility within staff contracts that allowed instructional aides to start late on some days and stay later on others to participate in staff inquiry time.

Hiring Staff Who Are a Good Fit

A further element enabling the successful organization of time at SMASH was hiring teachers who were committed to working in close collaboration. Hiring is coordinated through the district, but the school interviews and recommends candidates for hiring. Openings for certificated teaching positions at SMASH are posted by the district on the online site EdJoin, from which the principal can screen candidates. There is community input into hiring, with elected parent representatives (from each core where possible), teachers, and sometimes a student representative, participating in interview panels. Teaching staff that applied to work at SMASH were aware of the school's model, the multi-age classrooms, experiential learning, and teacher collaboration. As the principal noted,

The foundation of the school is that student voice and choice and learning through interest for both the adults and kids alike is essential, so [we] really haven't had the issue of someone coming here who wants to work in isolation because there's so many other places they would apply to. We're clear about what we're about, and there are plenty of people who we wouldn't attract. They wouldn't apply here, because they wouldn't want to. It takes a lot of work to be that intensely collaborative with other people.

Four of nine teachers we interviewed commented that a collaborative teaching environment was a factor in their choosing to work at SMASH. One teacher expressed how she had explicitly sought a school environment such as that at SMASH:

I moved here to work at this school. I taught in New York City, I taught in Rhode Island. I was looking for a certain type of school, so I moved across the country. I had my husband quit his job. I moved my kids to come teach here because this is what I wanted.

Several of the teachers indicated that, once openings had become available, they had made the move to SMASH from schools within the district after speaking with colleagues. SMASH, thus, tends to attract teachers with considerable levels of experience, and those with the will and skill to take advantage of the opportunities provided at SMASH.

The principal said that the school favored hiring those who were capable of teaching in more than one grade. This was in part due to the multi-age nature of the cores, but it also allowed teams to be adjusted if a core partnership wasn't working well or in case of staff turnover. Teachers hired at SMASH know that they may end up working in more than one grade.

Principal Support

All nine teachers we interviewed reported that the principal played a crucial role in providing time for teacher collaboration and learning. The principal was involved directly, whether acting as a substitute for teachers attending professional learning workshops or by participating in staff inquiry time. In addition, several teachers described the principal as being responsive to their need for collaboration time, with one noting,

[Our] opinions do have influence, when it comes to organizing time. I think because our principal listens so closely to what we say we need. I know that if I say, "I really wish we had more common planning time," which I know she's heard us say over the years, that she has tried to reorganize our time, so that we could have more core planning time.

In addition, the principal provides support to teachers by affording them with a degree of autonomy to adapt the way their cores operate, then the teachers negotiate with her to see that it works for the school. As one teacher noted, the expectation was not that each core would arrive at the same structure, but rather that scheduling should meet the developmental aims of students and teachers:

[The principal's] just such a phenomenal leader in terms of she also knows that we're different. Honoring our team versus another team and how we're going to roll is going to be different than they are. Being responsive to that and letting us go with that.

Having herself taught at the school prior to becoming an administrator, the principal is well versed in the philosophy and goals of the school and understands the utility of teachers having a voice in the schedules and curricula. For example, the teaching staff develops a new staff social contract each year, and decisions on how they want to develop as a staff are made jointly in discussion with the principal. Thus, the principal is more apt to see her role in constructing a schedule as a facilitator:

Well, I see my role as a really active listener, and a both clarifying and probing questioner, and leader of lots of reflective conversations with all of the adults including certificated, classified, parents, community members, as well as students. By having all of those reflective conversations, putting together what our sort of shared priorities are, that's the kind of meeting in the middle of what other people see and what my experience and training and intuition says in trying to build a collective investment and agreement about how we're going to move forward. [T]hat's basically how I see my role in all areas, including time.

Teachers commented that when organizing the schedule in their cores, the principal's leadership style helped them reflect on what was achievable and set realistic goals. One teacher noted,

The two of us [core partners] might have tons of ideas and [may] be thinking way bigger than is possible in reality, and she doesn't shut that down initially. She will hear us out and then maybe provide constructive feedback of, "Do you really think this is going to be possible?"

School Culture and Conscious Relationship Building

Seven of nine teachers commented on the sense of community and collegiality created through regular staff interactions. Teachers can share ideas without being guarded and can expect constructive feedback. Staff inquiry time included celebrating successes, and lunchtime informal meetings allowed teachers to connect more deeply beyond working issues.

Teachers understood that they put students' interests first and were there to provide mutual support in doing so. Perhaps the most vivid example took place when one teacher spontaneously "took over" instruction of her colleague's class to demonstrate a new instructional technique. The teachers had agreed to integrate a shared reading exercise into their advisory periods, a practice with which one of the teaching pair had considerable experience. Sensing that her colleague might gain from seeing the technique in practice, she led her 25 advisory students into the adjacent class and began leading the combined group:

Teacher 1: A perfect example of our partnership is her being so brilliant in literacy teaching and knowing my deficits. You asked me about this question of how we complement each other or how we learn from each other. She wanted to make sure that the shared reading happening in her morning meeting becomes a system in my morning meeting... She knew that the most effective way was to show up and hijack my morning meeting, and she did. My kids ignited and now we're on the same travel road.

Teacher 2: I just totally took over her morning meeting, and it was fine, and they were fine. She's okay with that, and she can take over things in my room, and I'm okay with it [too] because we know that it's for the greater good of the kids... You see how [the literacy coach] was like, "Oh, good. You're doing shared reading." I knew I couldn't just let my 25 kids have it and her kids not have it, and that she didn't understand what it looked like, so it'd be better if I just brought my kids in and modeled it with them, so that her kids could see what it looks like in action instead of her trying to just teach it raw.

In recalling the experience, one teacher explained that this was not seen as one colleague usurping the authority of another but as partners recognizing each other's strengths and sharing their abilities to progress a common agenda of meeting student learning needs:

The thing is, we have the type of understanding that I completely trust [her] the way I feel she trusts me if I [were to] come in and hijack her time. She just took them and rolled with it. I think that it's [important] for other people to understand that it start[s with] a partnership, laying down a foundation of common ground of understanding what we believe as educators.

Teachers described this environment of trust at SMASH as sharply contrasting with their experiences in other schools and districts. Some had experienced little time at all for collaboration, with one teacher commenting,

No one ever came to my room and ever said, “Let’s meet.” Where I was, I never talked to another teacher; they never said, “Here’s a mentor teacher, you’re new.” No one ever came to my room either. The principal? Never. The whole year.

Another teacher described how at schools where she had worked previously, there wasn’t the intentional development of trust in order to share skills and experience, noting,

With my school in [another state] where I started teaching, there was a much greater sense of competition. There’s testing, so parents wanted certain teachers. “What are you doing in your room?” It’s kind of like every man or woman to themselves a little bit. So you wouldn’t just walk into a room and just go, “Oh, I’m just looking around.” It just wouldn’t happen, or they’d be like, “Why, what are you looking at? What’s wrong?” People would just assume there was critique behind it.

The intentional development of strong personal relationships at SMASH was directed at strengthening professional relationships. One teacher described how the close working relationship within her core allowed her to draw on her partner’s abilities and to focus on supporting student projects:

As a teacher, you are entrusted with the education of children in every area, and being with [my core teaching partner] allows me to say I don’t have to worry about something as important as writing on my own, because I have someone who’s an expert and can really support me. And vice-versa.

[It] gives [my partner] the opportunity to take on something she loves and feels really competent in. And it gives me the freedom to really focus on things that are passions for me. For me to have the opportunity to specialize on STEAM and really be able to take curriculum and look at it long term and support children in long-term projects around science, around engineering, really helped me to be passionate every day in what I do.

Positive collegial relationships also allow teachers to work on curricular issues across grade levels. The question of how the mathematics curriculum was staircased across grade levels arising from a math learning walk that was being elaborated in staff inquiry sessions is one example.

Challenges in Scheduling and Teacher Collaboration. Schools face essential dilemmas in creating time in a way that best supports professional collaboration and student learning. Students arrive with differing academic and social and emotional learning needs, and schools must engage in a balancing act to organize time in a way to address these needs. As students must, by law, be supervised by a certificated teacher during class time, there are continual challenges in scheduling time when teachers can have noninstructional periods for professional collaboration. SMASH is no exception, and despite the opportunities for teacher collaboration in the schedule, several challenges persist.

First, the small size of SMASH's teaching staff limits the sharing of pedagogical content knowledge. A positive culture of sharing exists at the school. Teachers form informal and cross-core partnerships around shared subject materials and interests, and several teachers had taught across multiple grades, giving them familiarity with curricula at various levels. Nonetheless, teachers reported that subject- and grade-specific collaboration tended to be challenging, especially in the upper grades. Several teachers also expressed that collaboration outside the school was necessary for some subject-specific issues given the small size of the teaching staff (e.g., one teacher per grade level.) While the focus on relationship building was broadly appreciated by the staff, some staff members also expressed an ongoing need for additional support in content-specific pedagogy.

Second, three of the four cores were a pair, which meant that a good match among the pair was necessary for an effective partnership. This was the case among many of the teachers, but some had different teaching styles and methods. Cores, in the past, have been adjusted to facilitate complementary working styles and individual strengths, interests, and needs, in turn helped by hiring staff with capacity to teach across grades.

Addressing these essential dilemmas is not easy—in any school. The way SMASH has sought to address these ongoing challenges is through the organization of time to facilitate the intentional development of a school culture that values flexibility and prioritizes relationships, encourages teacher leadership, and is guided by a philosophy of teaching that is centered on students' academic, social, and emotional learning needs.

Conclusion

SMASH is an example of a small school whose innovative use of time disrupts the usual “grammar” of schooling. Starting with a vision of developing students who are active and engaged, with a voice in their learning, and a philosophy of teaching and learning that sees social and emotional learning as a foundation for academic success, SMASH has structured its use of time to allow for extended blocks for deeper, more project-based learning.

This same philosophy is carried over into the organization of teachers’ time. The ascription to social learning theory is reflected in the different blocks of time in which teachers can interact and work together. There is intentionality in the use of time for personal relationship development that in turn supports professional collaboration.

By creating their own schedules, teachers are able to exercise voice in how time is allocated. They are also empowered to use time flexibly to address challenges or try new approaches. Coupled with elements of the schedule changing from year to year, each core’s schedule is able to evolve, with teachers able to iterate and adapt it to support their students’ strengths, interests, and needs, as well as their own, across a wide range of developmental domains.

The result is a school culture characterized by shared values, shared decision-making authority, and mutual support. This culture creates an “open-door” environment, where teachers have opportunities to collaborate, reflect on their students and their teaching practice, receive feedback, and engage in ongoing teacher learning. Although this looks different across different cores within the school, and carries eternal dilemmas, it is valued as a means to achieve cohesion across grades and support students in their learning. Teachers have dedicated time to discuss individual students, compare observations, get support, learn new instructional strategies, and ultimately, enhance learning opportunities that benefit students.

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