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THE IMPACT OF COLLABORATIVE TEACHER TEAMING

ON TEACHER LEARNING

Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Educational Administration,
Leadership and Research
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Educational Specialist

By
Esther B. Dickinson

August, 2009

THE IMPACT OF COLLABORATIVE TEACHER TEAMING
ON TEACHER LEARNING

Date Recommended: June 22, 2009

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Dean, Graduate Studies and Research Date

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THE IMPACT OF COLLABORATIVE TEACHER TEAMING
ON TEACHER LEARNING

Esther B. Dickinson August, 2009 48 pages
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Schools have organized professional learning communities to support teacher learning and hopefully student achievement. An investigation of these learning communities may provide a description of professional teacher learning and suggest implications and implementation processes. The following question guided this inquiry: In collaborative groups, what learning is recognized by teachers and what do teachers think facilitates that learning? The qualitative study investigated how teachers that participate in collaborative teams describe the learning process. The teachers responded to interview questions following observations of team meetings. The findings reveal what teachers perceive about their learning. The findings suggest the qualities of the learning situations for the teachers, the learning as recognized by the teachers, and the changes in practices that the teachers implemented in the classroom. The study implies and/or suggests processes and procedures to guide and enhance teacher learning in collaborative groups.

THE IMPACT OF COLLABORATIVE TEACHER TEAMING ON TEACHER LEARNING

Problem

The increased interest in professional learning communities as a panacea for helping all students succeed by the year 2014 (as dictated by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) regulations and by the Kentucky State Board of Education) encourages exploration and examination of how these communities engender teacher learning and implicate student learning. Educator learning is an important focus for inquiry, specifically, how educators learn in collaborative groups.

Research Question

In collaborative groups, what learning is recognized by teachers and what do teachers think facilitates that learning?

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how teachers that participate in collaborative teams describe the learning process. The teachers responded to interview questions about learning together. The findings revealed what teachers perceive about their learning. The following question guided this inquiry: In collaborative groups, what learning is recognized by teachers and what do teachers think facilitates that learning?

Significance

The wide-spread implementation of the organization of teams referred to as professional learning communities draw attention of researchers and ask for clarification

of how teacher learning connects to teacher work in the classroom. The action research will contribute to my knowledge about how teacher learning occurs in collaborative group settings. I anticipated that teachers would tell me what they value about working with other teachers. The new knowledge will enable me, as a teacher leader to help other teachers plan for more effective and productive meetings. The knowledge will assist me, as an instructional leader in aiding teachers to employ strategies that enhance their learning as they work in collaborative groups. The knowledge gained from the study will assist me as a teacher leader and, in the future, as I aspire to career positions of school administration.

The study was limited due to the time of year, which allowed for very few meetings. Consequently, this study did not include extensive observations of team meetings. Nevertheless, in interviews the teachers described previous meetings at this school and from past experiences at other schools. This study was also limited by the focus on one team of teachers. This group of teachers gave extensive time for interviews, which provided an in-depth view of one collaborative group.

Definitions

The definition of collaborative teaming involves a group of people working interdependently to achieve a common goal through analysis to impact professional practice in order to improve individual and or collective results.

For the purpose of this literature review and future study, self-efficacy entails the individual teacher's belief or perception of their own effectiveness in the classroom. The generally accepted definition of collegiality implies that the relationship between professionals as perceived by those individuals shares the elements of respect, common values,

trust, tolerance, and authentic voice.

Literature Review

Introduction

The concepts and ideas that educators have entertained concerning collaboration, teaming, and collegiality have existed in professional literature for some years as was evidenced by the work completed by the Fort Worth School District in 1987 (Leggett & Hoyle, 1987). The Fort Worth School District provided a professional development for teacher leaders to learn not only to collaborate but also to return to their individual schools and coach other teachers on collaboration methodologies. The effort to instill collegial collaboration among teachers stressed its importance for achieving lasting change and success (Schmoker & Wilson, 1995). Schmoker and Wilson promote and suggest ways to incorporate collaboration among staff members and how to engender productivity of those groups.

Collaboration and teaming are undoubtedly benefits to all members of schools according to current studies (Brouwers, Evers, & Tomic, 2000; DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; Graham, 2007; Saurino, D. R. et al., 1996; Warren & Payne, 1997; da Costa, 1993). Evidence in current research on extent of and/or impact on student learning as affected by teacher collaboration or teaming has been examined (da Costa, 1993; Schmoker & Wilson, 1995). However, the research leads to questions concerning how the nature of teaming, collaboration, and collegiality affects teacher learning. This literature review will focus on the impact to teacher learning as a result of teaming or collaboration.

The terms collaboration and teaming, are both commonly used in the realm of

education and both carry with them various meanings and connotations. For the purpose of this literature review, the definition of teaming and of collaboration consists of a combination or blend of definitions taken from DuFour, R. et al.'s book, *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work: New Insights for Improving Schools*:

> Collaboration: A systematic process in which people work together, interdependently, to analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve individual and collective results. (p. 464) Team: A group of people working interdependently to achieve a common goal for which members are held mutually accountable. (p. 471)

Hence, for the purpose of this review and future study, the definition of collaborative teaming is a group of people working interdependently to achieve a common goal through analysis to impact professional practice in order to improve individual and/or collective results. The effects on teacher learning through collaborative teaming are the subject of this review and study. The examination of literature and research concerning teacher learning through collaborative teaming reveals distinct themes. The most common themes echoed in the research include teacher perception of self-efficacy, organizational elements, and teacher perceived collegiality.

Teacher Perception of Self-efficacy

The commonly accepted definition of efficacy involves the ability to have or cause an effect. Self-efficacy, for the purpose of this literature review and future study, means that the individual teacher's belief or perception of their own effectiveness in the classroom. The classroom teacher can and does cause effects in school and classroom. The measure of the impact and extent of those effects, the products of those effects, and the results of

those effects are related to student learning. Teachers who have participated in a collaborative effort or on a team have reported an increase in their belief of their efficacy in their classrooms (Cowley, 1999; Cowley & Meehan, 2001; Warren & Payne, 1997; Wiggins & McTighe, 2006).

Cowley and Meehan (2001) conducted a study involving 19 schools, (elementary and high schools), which participated in a project developed and promoted by the Appalachian Educational Laboratory (AEL). The AEL developed the project, entitled Quest, to fa-cilitate and support reform efforts in schools. This research originated due to a previous study completed by Cowley (1999) that examined teacher efficacy and professional learning communities using the same sample. In this study, Cowley and Meehan ex-amined the characteristics and relationships between teacher efficacy and professional learning communities. The authors used two main instruments to gather data. Cowley and Meehan surveyed the participating school teachers; the total surveys mailed were 1,040, while the total completed for the study was 624.

The instruments included Hord's School Professional Staff as a Learning Community and a Teaching Questionnaire based on Guskey's theory of internal and external efficacy. The Hord questionnaire consisted of five areas of interest. Each area of interest consisted of several questions. The areas of interest included administrators and teachers sharing authority, shared visions, collective learning and application, peer re-views, and school organization and scheduling. Respondents marked their perception of the item concerning where they believed their school to be on a five point scale (Cowley, 1999). Respondents would indicate the perceived level of implement-ation on a scale of one to five.

The Teaching Questionnaire measured internal and external efficacy. The internal

efficacy measured the extent that teachers perceive that they have "personal influence, power, and impact" on students in accordance with Guskey's definition (Cowley & Meehan, 2001, p. 3). The external efficacy measured the perceptions that teachers held that environmental factors impacted student learning, as per Guskey's definition (Cowley & Meehan, 2001). The questionnaire surveyed teacher beliefs concerning the influential elements that impact student learning. Cowley and Meehan (1999) found that the elementary teachers expressed higher levels of internal efficacy and a more intense self perception of a professional learning commmunity than the high school teachers and that the perception of self efficacy appears stronger in an elementary setting, which implements teaming, versus the traditional high school departmental setting.

The literature agrees that team collaboration impacts teacher efficacy, although the extent of the impact, or how the teachers measure that lacks clear definition. da Costa (1993) examined the issues of collaboration and learning, not only of the teachers but also of the students. The participants of the study included 30 elementary school teachers from British Columbia. The study was designed to be quantative in nature; da Costa used several instruments to gather data. The author used the Wheeless and Grotz's Individualized Trust Scale, Glickman and Tamashirc's Supervisor Beliefs Inventory, teacher reflection (audio taped conferences), and a teacher efficacy scale. The collection of data occurred twice during the school year. The format of the study included a division into four cells: (a) collaborative consultation, (b) collaborative consultation in a team teach-ing environment, (c) collaborative consultation without direct classroom observation by the teaching partner, and (d) collegial consultation without direct classroom observation by the teaching partner. The findings indicated that teachers in the

first and second cells (a and b) had higher levels of personal teaching efficacy; this supported the authors hypothesis that the collaborative process can influence teacher efficacy and thereby teacher growth. The findings suggest that high teacher efficacy shares a connection to improved student behaviors and learning.

Ross and Gray (2006) support this suggestion with their study. The authors conducted a study that examined the relationship of types or models of leadership and the impact on teacher efficacy. Bandura's social-cognitive theory served as a basis for the models. The models were labeled A and B to distinguish the difference: Model A became the hypothesis that leadership focused on change would enhance teacher commitment to school missions and goals by means of combined teacher efficacy, and model B hypothesized that more traditional direct leaders would engender teacher loyalty and indirectly cause an affect by way of teacher efficacy. The researchers implemented a survey, which involved all of the elementary schools in two Canadian school districts. They received 3,074 responses from 218 elementary schools. The survey questions examined the role of leaders in the schools as models for adult learners, the effectiveness of teachers and their teaching methods, direction of administrators concerning curriculum design, collegiality among the staff, and the community's perception of school success. The study revealed three specific findings: (a) leadership impacts teacher efficacy, (b) teacher efficacy indicates a commitment to partnerships, and (c) leadership affects teacher commitment. The study suggests that leadership, that is shared, that encourages change, and that supports collaborative efforts from the teachers increases teachers' perception of self efficacy.

The literature indicates that even hardened veteran teachers, resistant to change in

professional programs, can and will change through approaches grounded in reality and supported by administration. A two-year pilot program introduced 52 veteran teachers to form a professional learning community (Slick, 2002). The teachers responded positively and worked enthusiastically for personal and professional change. The teachers reported that collaboration and teaming aided and enhanced their perceived self efficacy. The respondents indicated, that due to the collegiality (socially and professionally) and shared learning that took place durning their meetings, efficacy increased. Slick's article supports and promotes the learning community as a positive impact on teacher efficacy, and stresses that the importance of essential organizational elements such as scheduling.

Organizational Elements

Warren and Payne (2001) conducted a study that supports Slick's argument for scheduling time for the teachers to collaborate, which leads to another commonality evident in the literature and concerns the organization of the school. Warren and Payne (2001) surveyed 82 eighth grade teachers in eight middle schools and four high schools, concerning their self-perception of efficacy and the working environment. The organization of the schools that participated in the study varied. Four of the schools had interdisciplinary teams with common planning, four of the schools had interdisciplinary teams without common planning, and the last four schools had a traditional departmental structure. The authors utilized two instruments to conduct their study, the Teacher Efficacy Scale and the Teacher Opinion Questionnaire. The Teacher Efficacy Scale measured the teachers' perception of their ability to overcome external influences and the impact that the teachers believed they had on student learning. The opinion questionnarie examined teachers' perceptions concerning shared values, managing student behavior,

instructional coordination, and collaboration among others. The authors specifically investigated common planning time as it related to teacher efficacy. Warren and Payne found that teachers on interdisciplinary teams with or without common planning time had a more positive perception of their work environment. The authors also suggest that teachers who share a common planning time have greater sense of self-efficacy. The authors also postulate that a sense of collegiality can develop from the collaboration of teachers with a common planning time, thereby enhancing teacher perceived self efficacy.

Teachers who have participated in collaborative teams and developed their own goals felt that collaboration was authentic (Wiggins & McTighe, 2006; Nolan, Hawkes, & Francis, 1993). The article by Nolan, et al. discussed the results and findings from three case studies. The authors indicated that more benefit derives from the teachers' ability to reflect and construct their own knowledge concerning their practices than an administrator instructing or correcting the practices of teachers. Team collaboration and time (essential for the success of this process) for discussion of the observations made leads to collegial relationships. The discussion should involve reflections of both the teacher and the observer. The time provided in the master schedule or in the daily organization of the school must be ensured for success. When the administrator gives directives concerning teacher learning, the collegiality of the team is affected negatively because teacher learning or the learning was not endorsed as having value from the teachers (Slick, 2002; Wildman & Niles, 1987). Wiggins and McTighe's (2006) article supports the development of collegial relationships and learning communities. The authors stated explicitly that teachers develop personalized learning goals. Wiggins and

McTighe examined a professional development program implemented in California. The program, the peer assistance and review panel (PAR), consisted of teachers and administrators who review and mentor other teachers. Veteran teachers act as coaches and mentors for new teachers to enhance their growth and effectiveness. The researchers found that the PAR program reduces isolation and increases the justification of method, lesson design, and assessments. To achieve success with PAR, the administration needs to provide time in the schedule for reviews and future learning. PAR instills the sense that all of the teaching staff should also be learners.

A common theme in the professional development of new teachers, found in currect literture, is that faculty members are viewed as learners. Wildman and Niles (1987) report in their article the importance for new teachers of collaboration but also as an aspect of mentorship. Essentially, the organization of the master schedule addresses these needs. As discussed earlier, the type of leadership in the school also had an impact on the success of collaboration and teacher efficacy (Ross & Gray, 2006). Teachers given the time to collaborate and given support by the administration had improved teacher self efficacy (Cowley, 1999; Cowley & Meehan, 2001; Graham, 2007; Saurino, D. R., Crawford, L., Cornelius, C., Dillard, V., French, J., & McSwain, M., 1996; Slick, 2002; Warren & Payne, 1997). Saurino et al.'s study supports the findings of other reasearchers. They indicated that the teachers who had common planning and allowed for collaboration led to greater teacher learning.

Saurino et al (1996) examined the benefits or advantages of team collaboration as an action research tool for teacher improvement. This qualitative case study conducted via symbolic interactionism involved three teachers. The authors described symbolic

interactionism as a process that focused on trying to understand the dynamics of human and group interactions. The study involved one interdisciplinary middle school teacher team. The study was conducted in phases: (a) planning, (b) baseline, (c) action, and (d) reflection. Each phase involved the teachers conducting interviews, making observations through collaboration concerning their practices, and observing students. Data collection included the team's collaborative efforts via audio transcription of interviews of the team as they collaborated, personal logs, and student interviews. Saurino et al. findings indiciated that the self-reflective questioning assisted the participants to better define practices they wanted to improve upon and allowed for collaborative problem solving. The study supports that collaboration can and does lead to teacher learning and that learning can be applied to the teacher's practices in the classroom. The organization of common planning, as supported by administration, engendered success in the teachers' learning process.

In support of Saurino et al. (1996) study, Firestone (1993) indicates in his article that the important facet in true reform is the collaborative group's time to meet and discuss aspects for improvement. The article discusses strategies to create authentic re-form in education versus *professionalizing* [author's italics] teaching.

Graham's (2007) study of teams examined the organization of the team and impact of the successful collaboration. Graham's discussion indicated that the size of the team will determine whether the team succeeds or not. According to the study's findings, team membership should be three people or more. The author examined the connection between a professional learning community and teacher improvement in a middle school and collected data using surveys, teacher interviews, and the review of school documents

The intent of the survey findings led to the identification of teacher behaviors and activities that were a part of the professional learning community. The interviews included ten teachers, concerning practices of the professional learning communities. The author also reviewed school documents to include team meeting minutes, the school improvement plan, internal surveys, the school's web site, and minutes from school meetings. The case study of a middle school lasted for one academic year and involved the 6th, 7th and 8th grade core content teachers. The findings included supportive elements such as common planning time, teacher collaboration, organizational and administrative facilitation, and team development that would enhance teacher learning as applied to practice. The results indicated that the professional learning communities gave the teachers the chance to learn from peers. The teachers indicated that their individual practices changed as a result of participating in the professional learning community.

Teacher Perceived Collegiality as Related to Teacher Learning

The increase in perceived collegiality appears as a theme evidenced throughout the literature concerning teacher learning as a result of teacher collaboration (Leggett & Hoyle, 1987; Nolan, et al., 1993; Wilson, 2007; da Costa, 1993). The generally accepted definition of collegiality is the relationship between professionals as perceived by those individuals and that the collegial relationship develops through collaboration. The various facets of collegiality often described in the literature include respect, shared values, trust, tolerance, and "gaining an authentic voice," (Slick, 2002, p. 200; Warren & Payne, 1997). Wilson (2007) studied the development of teaming skills in a graduate class of pre-service teachers. She used three forms of data collection: (a) reflective journal, (b) pre-service teacher artifacts with descriptive data, and (c) collaboration with other class

members. The student artifacts that were examined included journal writing and other assignments, the author's personal reflective journal (that she wrote in after each class), and informal interviews via writing prompts offered to the class participants on the first day, at mid-term, and at the final. Some of the prompts included "What concerns do you have about working on an interdisciplinary team?"; "What aspects of teaming do you like/dislike?" and "What do you feel are the benefits and challenges of working on a team?" (p. 5). According to Wilson's findings, the study indicated that the development of the collegial relationships resulted from a safe environment for participants to take risks, build community, overcome conflicts, and trust one another. The pre-service teachers highly valued their experiences in the team community and developed collegial relationships with their peers.

According to Johnson and Donaldson (2007), threats to collegiality and collaboration exist in established rituals and traditions. The established rituals and traditions lead to isolationism among teachers, leadership in the hands of the most senior staff members, and not recognizing the skills, talents, abilities of other staff members to contribute to a team, group or school (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007; Brouwers, et al., 2000). Johnson and Donaldson discuss the barriers and challenges that face teacher leaders in schools. Teacher leaders who try and act under the direction from administration face stumbling blocks and pitfalls from other staff members. The awareness of the administrative team and of the teacher leaders engenders success from collaboration, mentoring, or coaching. Teacher collegiality can be strengthened.

According to Brouwers et al.'s (2000) study, the lack of collegiality leads to teacher burnout. Brouwers and his fellow researchers examined relationships among the lack of

support, preceived self-efficacy in acquiring that support, and burnout. The participants were 277 teachers working in secondary (vocational) schools in the Netherlands. The data gathered through teacher perception surveys and data from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (1995) completed the study. The Maslach Burnout Inventory included items that concerned the teacher's perception of self-efficacy (Brouwers, et al., 2000). The authors discuss that not functioning as part of the school team indicated teacher burnout. The missing essential element of being able to collaborate with one's fellow teachers degrades teachers' performance in the classroom. The findings of the study indicate that teacher burnout can be predicted and inherently relates to perceived self efficacy in gaining support and collegial realtionships with fellow teachers.

Summary and Conclusion

Overall, the literature review supports that team collaboration does impact teacher learning. The literature also suggests that team collaboration has a positive impact on student learning (da Costa, 1993). The recurrent themes in the review of the literature are teacher self-perception of efficacy, organizational elements in the school and of the staff collaborative teams, and teacher perceived collegiality. The literature indicates that each of these themes impacts not only the success of collaboration but also the professional development of the teacher. The question that remains is how does team collaboration impact teacher learning? How does the teacher learning occur and what facilitates teacher learning in collaborative teams?

Method

Rationale for Qualitative Design

Today's schools are littered with numerical data. The analytical environment inun-

dated with data contributes to teacher frustration and overload. Today's teachers are swamped with quantitative information concerning each student in their classes (Ronka, Lachat, Slaughter, & Meltzer, 2009). Today's teachers work with students as unique individuals and students respond to each learning opportunity distinctively. Teachers understand the nature of their classrooms by differentiating instruction. Teachers consider the whole child when determining instructional practices. That flexibility is included in their instructional practices to teach the whole child (Schmoker, 2009). Teachers grasp the concept that qualitative studies are more fluid and flexible, similar in nature to their classrooms. According to Eisner (1998), the qualitative study and the course it takes are dependent on findings as the study progresses, much like the teacher and their instruction in the classroom. Therefore, conducting this study as qualitative allows the teachers the liberty to express their perceptions from a practitioner's stance.

The study was conducted using interviews and observations, which encouraged elaboration, explanation, and analytical thinking and data collection. The interview process elicited perceptions of the teachers concerning their learning process and significant elements of collaboration. The open-ended interview questions allowed elaboration by individual teachers to explain their perceptions more fully. Observation of the team meetings was conducted with the researcher acting as a passive participant observer. The researcher observed and took notes of the meeting. Documents were collected to validate meeting times and content along with other communications to the teachers in support of collaboration.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher assumed the role of a passive participant observer and as an inter-

viewer. The researcher conducted interviews using prepared questions. In Anderson, Herr and Nihlen's (2007) book, *Studying Your Own School*, the authors discuss the varying degrees of involvement of an action researcher. Anderson et al. state that when a teacher, acting as researcher, steps outside of their role as teacher, the role of researcher changes in the levels of participation. The researcher was the instrument used during the study (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). The researcher's role varied depending on the intensity of the participation with the subjects involved. According to Marshall and Rossman, the researcher's role may vary depending on the study and the situation. The researcher also experienced changes in role depending on the amount of time spent with the subjects as well as the knowledge level of the participants concerning the nature of the study. The shifting role of the researcher demands that the researcher acts as the instrument, which allows the researcher to interpret and to analyze events and data as they occur.

Setting and Data Sources

The school district is located in an economically depressed area of southwestern Kentucky. The largest employer in the county is the school district. Many members of the county population travel outside of the county for employment. The school district encompasses four schools: two elementary, one middle school, and one high school. The study involves the middle school. The middle school student body numbers approximately 450 and includes grade levels 6, 7 and 8. The faculty includes 24 certified teachers and five teacher assistants. The staff also includes a principal, assistant principal, guidance counselor, and two secretaries. According to school records, approximately 9% of the students receive free or reduced lunches. The composition of the student body population consists of 86% Caucasian, 10% African-American, 3% Hispanic, and 1%

other minorities. The middle school also has a 2% migrant population.

The school district has recently acquired Mac Books (laptop computers) for the students. The middle school received three mobile labs of laptops. These mobile labs have 30 laptops for the students' use. The teachers reserve the laptop carts as needed for their classroom use.

The teaching teams in the school are divided into grade level teams. Each grade level team instructs the same students. The grade level teachers are from each content area: reading, English, science, social studies, and math. Each team has a team leader assigned by the school principal. Another team in the school is the "Thoughtful Education Team." The eight members of this team are from each of the grade levels and various content areas. The "Thoughtful Education" team's purpose is to use "Thoughtful Education" strategies and subsequently teach other teachers in the building. Volunteers were asked to participate in the study.

Data Collection Procedures

Observations

An observation of the team meetings occurred during a regularly scheduled meeting of the team. The observation was prior to the interview sessions. As the study progressed, a future observation was warranted according to the findings. The initial observation of the team meeting took place after school hours in April, because of the time of year there was a limited opportunities for observations at the end of the school year. The meetings were held in the lead teacher's classroom. The focus of the observation was on the research question: In collaborative groups, what learning is recognized by teachers and what do teachers think facilitates that learning?

Interviews

The research question focused on individual teacher perceptions about the learning processes, and interviews gleaned information concerning perceptions of learning (Anderson et al., 2007). Interviews with the individual teachers took place after the initial team meeting observation and after classroom instruction that follows the collaboration meeting. The school and the interviewees received consent forms that described the nature of the study and the possible uses. The participants were assured of their anonymity and their option of being a non-participant. As the study progressed, questions arising from the data did result in future "mini-interviews" for the purpose of clarification or elaboration. Strict confidentiality of the participants' identity and their responsible were honored and observed. The interviews were scheduled May 1 through May 13. The interviews were conducted with several days between each interview so that transcription and coding of the data would take place while the interviews were fresh in mind. The interview questions are open-ended and semi-structured to allow for individual amplification and clarification of perceptions of their learning as a teacher (Spradley, 1979). The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed at a later date.

The questions gathered information concerning what facilitates the individual teacher learning and how that learning exhibits evidence in their classroom teaching and/or practices. The questions also revealed the teacher perceptions about collaboration and how that collaboration facilitates their learning.

Documents

Documents that support the collaborative nature of the team meeting were collected to validate collaboration. Examples of documents collected included the school master

schedule, team meeting minutes, emails concerning information about team meetings, hand-outs, and/or other documents brought to the meetings for teacher information.

Methods of Verification

The procedures for creating trustworthiness corroborates that this study has worth and deserves attention. Trustworthiness is the degree to which the findings are believable and mirror the ideas and individuality of the teachers in this study and not my own. The course of actions in building trustworthiness in this study includes triangulation. I built trustworthiness for this study using triangulation, journaling, peer debriefing, member checking, and crafting a thick description.

Triangulation

The word triangulation indicates the nature of the process. The researcher established trustworthiness of her study through the collecting of data from different methods or sources (Anderson et al., 2007). In this study, the researcher triangulated data through interviews, observations, and documents.

Reflexive Journal

From the development of the proposal to the final presentation of findings, entries in the reflexive journal served the research project as a record of information about self and the methodological steps of the research process. The term reflexive specifically refers to the self and the relationship of self as researcher to the unfolding project (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, this journal included my thoughts about the study, the method, and emerging data. The journal provided a place to review challenges encountered during the study, new ideas about the data, personal reflections throughout the study on what happened and the connection to my values or interests, and sudden insights that might

otherwise have been lost (Anderson et. al., 2007).

During the step-by-step methodological progress, the journal served as a memory storage place for ideas important at different decision points in the study: who to interview next; next steps in the research process; why decisions about the data developed one way or another; categories that emerged during analysis; and the outlines for ways to report the findings. I wrote entries every day of data collection and analysis. Such entries provided a means for tracing and tracking the development of the conclusions from the collected data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Anderson et. al., 2007).

Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing of the study occurred with fellow researchers who acted as "critical friends" (Anderson et al., 2007). Critical friends and peer de-briefers helped to minimize bias. During a peer de-briefing session, a discussion ensued of working with the emerging categories revealing verification of some categories and examination leading to exploration and reflection on the members' responses to develop additional categories and/or combine existing ones.

Member Checks

Member checks refer to the verification of the data collected from the participants. I delivered the transcriptions of the interviews and requested that the participants respond to verify or add any information. The participants responded with consensual agreement and self-reflective comments.

Thick Description

Based on information from the field notes and interviews, a description of the school and teachers involved in the study has been included. This information provides the

reader or other practitioners with knowledge so that a determination of similarities to other situations will enable others to determine transferability.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data that may occur continuously is commonly referred to as the constant comparative method. Using this approach, the first thoughts about the research question suddenly occurred during interviews or observations and led to further questions. I remained alert to emerging information that might answer the research question. After each observation, interview, and document collection, I transcribed the digitally recorded information, refined observation notes, and selected document information. Identification of segments of meaning from observation, interviews, and documents required separating the data into individual cards. Notations on the cards indicated who answered, the date of the answer, and finally, the card number. I conducted "open coding," which categorized all the information. I examined each segment of data and placed the data into a category or created a new category. Next, I determined how the categories connected or related to one another. This axial coding clustered the categories around more general themes. Lastly, I developed a narrative of how the categories answered the research question. This compilation of the data, commonly referred to as selective coding, aided me to construct an answer to the research question. All during the analysis the researcher must remember the research question (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Anderson et. al., 2007; Creswell, 1998).

Findings

Introduction

The research revolved around the question of what learning do teachers recognize and

what facilitates that learning as derived from working in collaborative groups. Schools have acknowledged that discussions, meetings, and teachers working in collaborative groups can make a significant impact on student learning ergo student success. The movement toward refining those discussions within collaborative meetings or professional learning communities suggested an examination of the perceptions, actions, and behaviors of the teachers participating in those communities and settings.

Setting

The rural school in this study has approximately 450 students. The majority of parents of the student body are blue-collar workers along with an ever decreasing number of students whose parents are farmers. There exists a small minority of students whose parents have professional careers (e.g. medical, educational, and engineering). The student body consists of a diverse group of children including a majority of white students and the minorities of African-American, Hispanic and Asian students. The students are all enrolled in the 6th, 7th, or 8th grade. The majority of the students have entered the middle school from two elementary schools, the exceptions being students who have moved into the district from other school districts or states. The teachers are all divided into grade level teams, excepting the Related Arts team and the Special Education team who teach each of the grade levels. Each grade level team consists of five teachers, one in each content area: math, science, English, reading, and social studies.

The 8th grade level team volunteered to take part in the study. One teacher withdrew from the study. There are approximately 145 students in the 8th grade, which makes the average class size 29. The team consists of five female teachers, each with various levels of experience. All of the teachers are veteran teachers, with experience numbering be-

tween 9 and 22 years. As a group, the teachers bring with them experiences from teaching in other high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools outside of the district in which they are currently employed. The teachers hold degrees that cover a wide range of areas and interests and in which they have completed work. Each of the team members holds a Masters degree, either in her subject area or in Education.

The school's master schedule consists of the traditional seven-period day. The seven periods include math, science, English, reading, social studies, and two related arts classes or remedial classes. The related arts classes are art, music, band, physical education, and Practical Living. The remedial classes are reading and math. The school district mandated an Early Release Friday (ERF), and the school day for students ends at approximately 1:00 each Friday. On the ERF schedule each class meets, although the classes meet for a reduced amount of time.

The eighth grade master schedule does not provide a common planning time. The teachers occasionally have "working lunches" to make decisions about activities that will affect all of the teachers or to communicate information from the administration. The team meetings are scheduled or called by the team leader. The team leaders were assigned by the administration at the beginning of the school year. The team meetings are all scheduled after school or on Early Release Fridays after previously scheduled meetings called by the school administrator or the district office. On several occasions, meetings were called shortly after a full staff meeting or as the day-to-day business of the school progressed. There are no set schedules when team meetings are to be held. A directive from administration mandated that teacher meetings should be monthly, although the time and date of the meetings was determined by the teacher leader. The

team leaders are not required to submit minutes or attendance to the principal. The administration has allowed the team leader to determine the frequency (more than monthly) and length of team meetings.

The Following Answers to the Research Question

The research question is, "In collaborative groups, what learning is recognized by teachers and what do teachers think facilitated that learning?" The following summary statement answers this research question: Teachers value and learn in collaborative groups, which best facilitate learning through productive team meetings that are characterized by teacher leadership, planning and organization, and focused topics. The following themes contributed to the development of this summary statement. The themes represent data collected from observations, interviews, and documents.

Learning Definitions

The responses indicated that learning for teachers consists of communication and working as a team for the success of the students. Teachers specified that learning for them resembled learning that they have observed in classroom settings with students. As one respondent stated, "When we are talking, collaborating, communicating together, and working together as a team then learning is taking place, just the same as when we watch our students" (01/09-04). Each teacher indicated during the interviews that through communication and discussion of the students and practices each learned and employed those practices in the classroom. One teacher defined learning for herself as ". . . it would be us talking about kids and how to help a child succeed in each one of the classrooms. That would be learning for us" (03/09-03). One other teacher defined her learning and what she recognized as learning by stating "well, ah, we copy each other" (02/09-03). How

teachers defined their learning influenced the way all the interview questions were answered.

Teacher Learning in Collaborative Groups

The teachers' learning through discussions was focused around four major topics during their team meetings: (a) materials and administrative information, (b) student academics and discipline issues, (c) assessment methods, and (d) teaching strategies. Each of these topics was not always included in each meeting, but arose as needed. According to one teacher "the topics are what the current needs are for the time period for whatever's coming up or we need to get done" (04/09-10). Some discussion involved materials, procedures, and processes, not only for new teachers but also for teachers new to the building. The team members reported that they assisted each other in locating needed materials or informing other members concerning procedures that were specific to the management and operation of the school at different times during the year.

One topic that the teachers discussed in during team meetings was student discipline and academic success of specific students. Discussions involved discipline referrals and details of those referrals. Teachers discussed specific students and their needs with the intention of removing the barriers from the student, so that he/she would be successful. The discussions of specific student academic success involved teachers sharing grades or averages of that student in other content core classes. The teachers' discussion then evolved into what instructional practices existed in one class and not in the other, or what motivational aspects existed in one class and not in the other class. Teachers also used the time to gather information for students concerning any referrals for other services offered in the school. As one teacher reported, "We talk about that a lot . . . which kids we feel

are struggling if they don't have an IEP, do we need to try to get one for them. . ." (04/09-27).

Another recurring topic involved assessments, types of assessments, and frequency. Through discussions of types of assessments (formative and alternative) teachers decided to implement changes of their methods in their classrooms. If the teacher did not feel that the change was beneficial she returned to the method that was previously in place; although one teacher said that the new method and its success or failure should have been discussed in a following meeting.

Team discussions included classroom teaching strategies, the school has initiated an instructional program entitled "Thoughtful Education," which became the main topic in many of the meetings. The teachers discussed how a particular activity or practice worked in each different classroom and reflected on the success of the activity in relation to student success or involvement. According to the teachers, their instructional practices changed due to team meeting discussions. One teacher stated, "We just talked about how we were going to do it [Thoughtful Ed strategy], and we did it by like content, like for math how does this look, social studies how does this look . . . and that helped me to prepare what I needed for my classroom" (01/09-06). Teachers revealed that they exchanged ideas on practices and methods whether the practices were "Thoughtful Education" methods or another proven method that worked for a particular student. One teacher responded that the discussion entailed "different methods of instruction . . . teaching to different learning styles, hands on, a variety of lectures" (04/09-01). The data indicated that teachers made changes in practice, as one teacher stated, "I might change it as I go through it" (02/09-34) but did not always write changes on lesson plans.

The teachers also stressed that during a team meeting listening to others and asking questions of others contributed to their growth because "I need to know things that really work . . . we don't have these kids very long and I don't need to waste time" (01/09-16).

Productive Team Meetings

Teachers perceived that the most productive team meetings are facilitated by leadership, organization/planning, and staying on task or focus during the meetings. During all team meetings, the teachers were learning, whether it concerned new practice in the classroom or school business. One teacher stated, "Usually each team meeting, 'cause we learn something . . . things we need to do and we need to know" (04/09-05). The teachers did agree that the topics should be narrower about "what we should be doing, and what we are doing, and how we could help each other" (01/09-11).

Teacher leadership. Teachers said that effective teacher leadership was essential to teachers learning during team meetings. A teacher stated that the leadership needs to be "someone there that keeps us on track" (03/09-10). The leadership of the team was indicative to the success of the learning and satisfaction of the team members. The teacher leader's effectiveness determined the productivity of the meeting because "they need a stronger leader at this time. . ." (03/09-28) and that the discussions became "they're looking . . . this is what's best for me, and this is what's best for me in my classroom" (03/09-27). The skills or lack of skills of the teacher leader directly impacted the effectiveness of the meeting. The skill of the lead teacher to build collegiality and to instill the importance of the school's mission or vision among the team members related to the productivity of the team.

The behaviors and professionalism of the teacher members impacted the success of

the meetings. During one observation of the teachers' team meeting, the teachers did not follow the agenda but rather discussed issues that they were personally having in class rooms. The discussions devolved into "gripe sessions" (03/09-29) regardless of the efforts of the team leader to direct the discussions. Many meetings have been considered time consuming events and attending the meeting was resented. One teacher responded that in a previous school, team meetings were held during planning "so that meant that one fifth of our planning was absolutely shot" (02/09-08). Team meetings were not a priority for the teachers. The meetings became unproductive, "that's why I send emails . . . I don't get replies back . . . I don't see anything productive coming from our team meetings" (03/09-23). Lack of productivity resulted in not calling meetings to discuss topics and became a barrier to teacher learning by removing the opportunity to meet. The documents collected supports this in that team meeting announcements were sent to the teachers via email that included a list of topics to be covered during that meeting. Mandatory meetings led to short-cuts on the part of a lead teacher and the team members. As one teacher reported, "sometimes [the lead teacher] was so busy and we were so busy, that we need to work on things for our class, that [the lead teacher] would just write something down and turn it in to the principal" (02/09-09). In some instances, meetings were reduced to the lead teacher completing a document, which substantiated the meeting, and requesting that other teachers sign prior to submitting the document to administration. Such actions replaced a meaningful learning opportunity for the teachers.

Organization and planning. The organization and planning of the meetings was directly related to teacher collaboration and learning. The administration of the school impacted the planning of team meetings. Lack of consistency in frequency of meetings

and between teams in a school had an effect on teacher collaboration or whether teachers met at all. Meetings were largely affected by lack of time to meet. There was no common planning time for the teachers provided by the master schedule. Teachers responded that the most effective meetings were held during lunch or during common planning, as at other schools they had worked in during the past. If the "administration needed some--thing and the teachers had to meet, then plan to meet" (02/09-39). Otherwise the meetings sometimes occurred in the hallways between classes, via email, or during lunch, and that "lack of structure works to our advantage" (02/09-43). Sometimes teachers met on an as needed basis. "It's not like every Wednesday or every Friday" (02/09-11). The team leader would call a meeting and the teachers brought "paper and pencil" (01/09-26). The documents collected support the data concerning communications via email. The teachers indicated that there have not been agendas present for each meeting, although the teachers believed that agendas led to more productive meetings.

The most productive meetings were when all team members were present for the meeting and an agenda existed for that meeting. The teachers reported that an agenda assisted in maintaining a focus and impacting the productivity thereby saving time. Meetings improved simply because "we wrote down what each person needed to get on the list and that way each person had a chance to verbalize" (04/09-16). Prepared agendas assisted teachers by allowing them to gather information for the meeting topics and staying focused on those topics. Teachers believed the meetings that had agendas and goals were more productive because the members knew the topics and understood the goals. Some teachers reported that a prepared agenda "keeps me on track and in line, and it gets us in and out a lot sooner" (03/09-17) and that an agenda lead to productivity "that way

everybody knows what's going on" (04/09-16).

Topic focus and staying on task. Teachers recognized that topics of team meetings have changed over time, becoming more focused on student success and instruction in the classrooms. Additionally, teachers reported that some topics derived from a full staff meeting and were carried over into team meetings. Conversely, meetings were still largely gripe/gossip sessions that led to a lack of focus or purpose for the team meeting. Teachers did not always talk about what they are doing in their classrooms. Teachers also responded that other members, especially new teachers, need to "really dig into how they create the atmosphere for teaching and learning" (01/09-37). Lack of focus on the tasks was due to various reasons ranging from their personal lifestyle, feeling overwhelmed, and having unreasonable expectations. The data indicated that lack of focus and staying on task were largely due to human nature and day-to-day events in individuals' personal lives as having the major impact on attentiveness during team meetings. The teachers also suggested that people sometimes tuned out due to health related problems, apathy and/or being absent; when that occurred, the discussion became personal "gripe sessions" (03/09-14) and focus of the meeting dissolves, so that "nobody's talking about the real problems of the school. Nobody even gets down to it" (02/09-45).

Having established rules and agendas led to more productive meetings or staying on track. Teachers responded that it was the responsibility of each member to maintain focus during meetings. That focus during a meeting, was up to each team member, respecting each other and "taking up the slack" (02/09-18). The teachers indicated that the lack of focus or staying on task was not a priority, due to the size of the group and the fact that they tried to observe "those basic rules you've learned in kindergarten" (02/09-22).

Value of Collaborative Team Meetings

The teachers that participated in the study made multiple comments about the value of team meetings. One teacher responded that talking with co-workers "just gives me confidence that . . . maybe all of us are having the same difficulties; we're in the same boat" (02/09-02). Another teacher emphasized the stress relief within the team: "Everybody struggles. Some days everything's pretty good and just seeing the humor in a lot of situations helps take away a lot of the stress . . . to me, that's one of the fun things about team meetings" (04/09-05). Teachers build personal and professional collegiality through team meetings (James, 2003). The teachers indicated that meeting with their team enhanced not only their professional duties but also their personal lives.

Teachers reported that "just creating bonds" (01/09-32) was extremely beneficial. Building rapport with other teachers was reported as valuable as well as "letting off steam. . ." (04/09-34) from the stresses of the day-to-day operation of the school. Some teachers reported that the atmosphere of trust created within the team allowed them to "just being able to vent, you know and they understand" (01/09-35). Relating to someone who shared the same "struggles" was reported as a positive aspect of team meetings (04/09-35). The teachers stressed that being "loyal and supportive" (04/09-36) as important facets of team meetings and finding humor in situations that occurred throughout the day added to the support system (04/09-33).

Professionally, the teachers reported that being able to discuss instructional issues in the classroom was to their advantage and that when the teachers were able to sit and work collaboratively they were more productive. Some teachers found meaning in discussing issues and practices and "being able to talk to someone who's actively teaching . . . is

much more productive and meaningful than someone coming down who is not in the classroom and telling me things to do" (01/09-15). The teachers also stressed that being able to discuss the same students led them to examine the situations or learning environments students were in, so that they could reflect about "How can I've handled that differently?" (02/09-01).

Collaboration was praised by the teachers as an advantage. Teachers valued the opportunities to share student work, ideas for instruction, and in general "things we need to do for the kids" (04/09-03). They emphasized that equal participation was important, valuing their team members and working together. One teacher revealed that the benefit of teachers working in a collaborative team was healthy for the team and the school and that "one teacher becomes a group of 5 or 6 teachers . . . . Together you can do some pretty neat things; singly, you might as well hang it up" (02/09-42).

Literature Review and Findings

The findings echo many points in the literature review; the more significant points included teacher leadership, collegiality, organization and planning, teacher learning, and authenticity. The findings from this study did indicate the importance and impact of collaboration to teacher learning. Significantly, this provides support that teacher meetings lead to teacher learning thereby effecting teacher efficacy and success in the classroom environment.

Prior Research Support

Ross and Gray (2006) reported that teacher leadership impacts teacher efficacy and that shared leadership encourages change and supports teachers' collaborative efforts. In this study, teachers reported that effective teacher leadership in team meetings enhanced

teacher learning and productivity, which enhanced teacher efficacy.

The study also reflected the findings of Johnson and Donaldson (2007). Those teacher leaders who act under the direction of the administration encounter barriers and "egalitarianism" (p.11). The teachers reported that mandatory meetings not only led to shortcuts taken by the teacher leader but also an elimination of team meetings and resorting to email communication to convey information due to meetings devolving into "gripe sessions." The positive benefits from team meetings at that point in time were negated. Team collegiality suffered a reduction in spirit and effectively lowered team productivity. According to the Brouwers et al.'s (2000) study, not operating as a team was an indication of teacher burnout and degraded teacher performance in the classroom.

Slick (2002) found that team collegiality, personal and professional, led to teacher efficacy. In the present study, teachers valued their collaborative meetings that created a bond. The teachers reported the importance of sharing with others who were experiencing the same challenges as beneficial to collegiality. The teachers also reported that building that partnership of support added to their own effectiveness as teachers as also found in Wilson's (2007) study. Wilson suggested that building community and creating a safe environment for members to take risk, enhanced collegiality. Wilson's and Slick's studies found, as in the present study, that building relationships and sharing information led to enhanced teacher performance.

Warren and Payne (2001) reported in their study that teachers on interdisciplinary teams shared a more positive perception of their work environment, with or without common planning time. The teachers who participated in this study did not have common planning and met during lunches or after school. The teachers were comfortable with this

arrangement, although Saurino et al. (1996) study points to common planning as a means to teacher growth. Saurino et al. study found that providing a common planning increases teacher growth and learning. The teachers in this study felt that a common planning would lead to more effective meetings. Both Slick (2002) and Saurino et al. (1996) found that common planning engendered success in the teachers' learning process.

Teachers' learning and authenticity were indicated to be important by the teachers involved in this study. Learning from each other was more beneficial than "someone telling us what would be good" (01/09-02). Such authenticity was stressed in the Nolan et al. (1993) study, and teachers in this study said, "I need to know things that really work" (01/09-16). Nolan et al. indicated that more benefit derives from the teachers' ability to reflect and construct their own knowledge rather than dictates from administration. Teachers participating in collaborative team meetings or professional learning communities develop their own goals and learning objectives (Wiggins & McTighe, 2006; Knud, 2002). The teachers in this study indicated that the topics of their team meetings should be "what we should be doing, and what we are doing, and how we could help each other" (01/09-11). The teachers said that learning from their own team enabled them to change practices in the classroom, and that engendered success for their students.

New Findings

This study did reveal new findings. Teachers are cognizant of what makes a collaborative meeting more productive and meaningful. As some teachers reported: "The most productive is when we are all there . . . we have an agenda and we don't waste time" (04/09-11; 04/09-12) and when "we had clearly defined goals" (01/009-24). However, the teachers are not doing this; some teachers reported, "we don't normally have a

prepared agenda" (01/09-25) and "I don't think there has been one" (03/09-11). One teacher made a point that the "lack of structure works to our advantage" (02/09-43). According to the findings of this study and findings of studies in the literature review, this "advantage" is not an advantage that leads to teacher collaboration or opportunities to learn.

The focus of this study was limited to one collaborative-teacher team. The time of year also limited the study since the school year ended in June, and the study was completed in May. The time available to observe team meetings was shortened. However, the interviews provided more in depth information concerning collaboration of teacher teams because the teachers referred to meetings in the past at this school and meetings at other locations.

Findings and Professional Benefits

The action research and literature review has contributed to my knowledge about how teacher learning occurs in collaborative group settings. The research question and proposal also enhanced my knowledge concerning existing practices in schools, the modifications and ramifications of changing existing practice, and the existing interpersonal relationships between the teachers. The teachers are veteran teachers and had various experiences with team meetings, which colored each answer to the interview questions. The teachers relied on their prior employment experiences in answering some of the questions. The interviews sharpened my awareness; the behaviors of the teachers during interviews revealed indications of what they felt were important as well as trivial aspects of team meetings. For example, one teacher responded that team meetings were "gripe sessions" and continued with "I know you think I'm teasing, uh, but I [am] (laughter)

really not" (30/09-29). Another teacher implied that rules or norms were not necessary, "we try to be nice to each other, we try to listen to each other and those aren't written down, we don't have to yell norms and all that stuff, that's silly (laughter) (02/09-23).

The Qualitative Research Approach

The qualitative research revealed that the past experiences of these teachers impacted their perceptions of team meetings and teacher learning. Qualitative research offered a depth and breadth of scope that cannot be achieved only through the analysis of quantitative data. The ability to respond and to extend their responses led to a greater sense of what the teachers meant concerning their answers, which in turn created a sense of voice or validation for the teachers. A quantitative study would not have revealed the "richness" of their explanations or the additional textures and nuances of their answers through their own body language and connotations of the words or phrases used to answer the questions.

The importance of the process of journaling and peer debriefing was extremely beneficial. The reflexive journal enabled me to "hold my thinking" giving me time to ponder the responses, questions and procedures or "next steps" involved in the study. Peer debriefing allowed me to discuss my thoughts concerning my study with a group that could respond with questions and suggestions. Peer debriefing refined my thoughts and warned me of assumptions based on personal perceptions thereby allowing me to focus on the data in answering the research question.

Teacher Leader

My new knowledge about my school will enable me, as a teacher leader to lead and help other teachers plan for more effective and productive meetings. Enhancement of

planning and organizing team meetings to facilitate teacher learning will enable the teams to accomplish goals and serve students more efficiently. The study suggested that prepared agendas and definite goals lead to greater productivity. As a teacher leader I will accomplish more with this knowledge than previously. The frequency and scheduling of meetings are also crucial to success as the study revealed. Subsequently with that knowledge I will be better able to plan and schedule meetings to enhance teacher learning.

The findings concerning teachers' perception of not only the value of the meetings but also the learning and new knowledge they glean from the meetings will assist in aiding teachers to develop a more consistent and systematic implementation of interventions for struggling students. The importance of authenticity, by developing their own goals and learning objectives, leads to my own understanding of the priority of the team determination of those goals and objectives. The knowledge that I have gained will assist me in facilitating meetings so that they will become a more student success centered activity.

Administrator

My knowledge will assist me as an instructional leader at an administrative level in aiding teachers to employ strategies that enhance their learning as they work in collaborative groups. The teachers responded that the most productive meetings were meetings that included an agenda and set goals. As an administrator, I will require that the teachers share the development of an agenda and goals for each meeting. The teachers also reported that team leadership was important to productive meetings. I will ensure that the teacher(s) receives professional development on teacher leadership. From the study, I have a better understanding of the need to make common planning in the master

schedule a priority. With the existing goal of student success, it will behoove me as a school administrator to ensure that the teachers have the tool of common planning time. Common planning allows the teachers the freedom to meet in collaborative groups during the school day, versus after school, the traditional time for teacher meetings, thereby increasing teacher efficacy in the classroom setting.

My new knowledge leads to urgency in the development of an understanding concerning the discussions occurring in staff team meetings. As an instructional leader, I will be better able to facilitate a leadership team in planning and organizing team meetings. As I assist the team leaders to determine topics or goals and sharing their leadership with the members of the team to maintain authenticity leads to enhanced teacher learning. This new knowledge has created an "inner-eye" through reflection. If I require team collaborative meetings, I also need to monitor the meetings versus solely becoming a "collector of documentation" and thereby increase teacher learning or the opportunities for learning.

The study also aided the acquisition of my new knowledge to coach and prepare other teacher leaders to become more efficient and capable meeting facilitators. Through this acquisition of new knowledge, as an instructional leader, I will be able to determine and understand to a greater extent what topics of professional development that would yield the greatest benefit for my staff. Through shared leadership of the teams, the members can determine what best meets the needs of their teams to enhance their own learning and lead to more growth stemming from professional development.

The study has revealed additional knowledge that will enable the direct facilitation of a deeper sense of collegiality among staff members. Building partnerships through shared experiences will augment the school culture and professional collegiality of the staff. The

development of a culture of professional collegiality will reduce or perhaps eliminate the traditional isolated practices and relegate those practices to the past.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative research was the determination of teacher learning in collaborative team meetings and what facilitates that learning. Teachers' meetings were observed, the teachers were interviewed, and documents were collected. The interviews were transcribed and coded to arrive at an answer to the research question. The most common themes found in this research included teacher perception of self-efficacy, organizational elements, and teacher perceived collegiality.

The data obtained and analyzed from this research suggested teacher learning deriving from collaborative team meetings impacts classroom practice and procedures. Facilitation of teacher learning occurring in collaborative team meetings included teacher leadership, organization/planning and staying on task or focus during the meetings. In this study, teachers valued team collaboration meetings. The findings of this study indicated the processes and procedures, which will facilitate more productive team meetings, which in turn could lead to changes in practice.

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Appendix
Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. What do you perceive to be the most valuable thing that happens in your team meetings?

2. Give me an example of what learning looks like in your team?

3. Talk about a time when you thought learning was occurring for you or other teachers during a team meeting?

4. Think about how you did team meetings . . . How has your team meetings changed over time?

5. What changes have there been in topics for meetings with your team and how have those changes come about?

6. What do you think or feel aids your ability to learn from your team meetings? Tell me about one of your most productive team meetings.

7. How does having established norms or rules help during your team meetings?

8. Give me an example of a time when people "tuned out" and things weren't working.

   What do you think could have gotten people back on track?

9. Give me an example of a time when people were really listening and participating recently.

   What do you think made the meeting work?

10. How does prepared agenda work for you?

11. How does having established norms or rules help during your team meeting?

12. Tell me something you have learned and that you use in your classroom from a team meeting.

13. Give me an example of a time when you have changed your assessment methods as a result of a collaborative team meeting?

14. Tell me about a time when you have changed your lesson design (how it was written) due to information from a team meeting.

15. What are some valuable things that happen during the time together?

16. What would you tell a new teacher about team meetings?