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Exploring the Impact of Teacher Collaboration on Teacher Learning and Development

Tami Burton
University of South Carolina - Columbia

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF TEACHER COLLABORATION ON TEACHER LEARNING
AND DEVELOPMENT

by

Tami Burton

Bachelor of Science
Augusta State University, 2006

Master of Education
Augusta State University, 2008

Specialist
Augusta State University, 2009

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Accepted by:

Rhonda Jeffries, Major Professor

Ed Cox, Committee Member

Tambra Jackson, Committee Member

Paul Solomon, Committee Member

Lacy Ford, Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the impact that teacher collaboration has on teacher learning and development. Through data collection and analysis of teacher questionnaires, observations, a focus group, and interviews, collaboration was investigated for its impact on how teachers build on their unique pedagogies. The study included 22 participants in a rural elementary school in South Carolina. Three common themes were identified and explored for their relation to teacher learning and development. An in-depth look at the participant's perceptions was provided. The findings of this qualitative study demonstrated that effective teacher collaboration incorporates having shared or common goals, teacher efficacy, and positive interdependence of teachers. Other related themes emerged, such as effective collaborative practices that enhances the learning environment. This study also reveals how the role of school leadership is needed to encourage and monitor teacher collaboration in order to increase its effectiveness.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The Essentialist movement significantly altered the focus of public education in the United States. William Bagley launched the Essentialist movement in the 1930s. In his article, *An Essentialist's Platform for the Advancement of American Education*, he argued how education was straying significantly from the "basics" or the essential skills needed to compete with other industrialized nations. He stated, "A specific program of studies including these essentials should be the heart of the democratic system of education" (p. 253). The Essentialist perspective suggests that in order to be superior to other nations, the United States must build an educational approach that would guarantee the transmission of crucial knowledge to its students (Blanford, 2010). Bagley (1938) concluded that American education is ineffective; therefore, classroom teachers should be authority figures and experts in their subject areas. In other words, classrooms should be teacher-centered with little importance given to student's interests, but more emphasis on testing students and teachers. The Essentialist Platform aimed to promote intellectual growth through rigorous content, and through the mastery of concepts and principles in order for students to become model citizens.

Essentialism was resurrected in the 1950s in response to Sputnik and again in the 1980s with the Ronald Reagan administration, which advocated a national curriculum titled *A Nation At Risk* (1983)(ANAR). ANAR was a national curriculum that stemmed from "back-to-basics" school reform. Emphasis on higher and measurable standards for

academics was placed on schools in an effort to protect the American economy. Other Essentialist inspired acts include the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* under the William J. Clinton administration, the "No Child Left Behind" act (NCLB) in 2002 under the George W. Bush administration, and the recent *Common Core Standards* (2011). The implementation of NCLB stipulates that schools are held accountable for specific standards and expectations in the core subjects (Blanford, 2010).

Blanford (2010) suggested that such legislation has caused a fundamental shift in focus away from topics and educational approaches, which creatively engaged the hearts and minds of students, to those that require successful mastery of academic drills and completion of standardized tests. Some argue that Essentialism is one of the main contributors to teacher autonomy (Goddard, Goddard and Miller, 2010). With added pressure on teachers to demonstrate their competence in education through high stakes assessments, teachers are not compelled, or motivated to work cooperatively with one another.

Collaborative Learning

Collaborative Learning is often linked to the term cooperative learning. The idea behind collaborative learning involves two or more individuals working together to accomplish a task or produce a product in a particular way (Gunter, M., Estes, T., and Schwad, J., 2007). Lev Vygotsky's (1962) social theories promoted collaborative learning. He argued that learning stems from the exchange of ideas and interactions. The collaborative practices movement began to surface recently in schools because of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 1973 (Pugach, Blanton, and Correa, 2011).

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Efforts were made to address the learning needs of students with disabilities through special education and general education collaborative practices. Debates about inclusion appeared in the 1980s through the 1990s and served as a motivating factor of teacher collaboration (Pugach, Blanton, and Correa, 2011). The integrated approach compelled both general and special education teachers to work cooperatively with one another for the purpose of providing students with disabilities a quality education in the least restrictive environment. The value in collaboration evolved in settings from just focusing on students with disabilities, to focusing on providing all students with engaging and innovative learning opportunities. As a result of NCLB and a growing diversity in student populations, many schools have adopted collaborative systems and programs to assist in addressing the needs of students (Pugach, Blanton, and Correa, 2011). Recent research has also suggested that teacher collaboration has positive outcomes for teachers. Goddard and Goddard (2010) discovered from their research that teachers reported improved attitudes towards teaching, teacher efficacy, and understanding of student learning. Teachers discussed having a shared sense of responsibility (Williams, 2010).

Teacher Collaboration and Student Achievement

Existing teacher collaboration research focuses on collaboration practices in an effort to improve student achievement. Goddard and Goddard (2010) stated that teachers are professionals and possess unique knowledge about their students and how they learn. When effective collaboration occurs, teachers' knowledge and experience are diffused and instruction is enhanced. Teachers with various levels of experience that collectively

focus on improving student learning are most effective in increasing student achievement (Williams, 2010).

Teacher Autonomy

Inger (1993) suggested that teacher autonomy is grounded in norms of privacy and non-interference. Teacher autonomy began to increase significantly in the past decade due to substantial barriers, such as training, scheduling, and status differences (Inger, 1993). With greater emphasis on high stakes testing, teachers are consumed with teaching to the test. Blanford (2010) concluded that the nature of teaching itself has been minimized to fact retention drills. Students are simply learning to commit the content presented to memory, and success is determined by high test scores. This behavior may have led to the breakdown of learning communities and teacher collaboration. School faculty are not encouraged to engage students in the process of helping students make connections between academic content and their daily lives, and fostering involvement in the broader community (Blandford, 2010). Instead, teachers are working in isolation, and often are encouraged to compete with one another. According to Rosenholtz (1989), isolation is one of the greatest impediments to teaching because it limits teachers to only their trial and error experiences. Contradictory to the recent Essentialist inspired reforms, NCLB and Common Core, which suggest that teaching the essential subjects is the gateway to student success, other research suggest that teacher collaboration helps to identify students' talents and engage their learning beyond high stakes testing (Blandford, 2010). An investigation of how teacher collaboration influences teacher learning needs to be conducted to understand the nature of the relationship.

Challenges of Collaborative Work

Although encouraged in schools' improvement plans, teacher collaboration is not usually monitored or investigated (Goddard & Goddard, 2007). Some collaborative practices are unstructured and inconsistent. This leads to perceptions from teachers that collaboration is unvalued or not obligated (Sawyer and Rimm-Kaufman, 2007). Professional development is usually only offered as a quick-fixed approach to the goals of the school improvement plan, causing a decline in the sustainability of teacher collaborative opportunities.

Collaborative groups are composed of diverse personalities and unique belief systems, and this makeup of individuals can create unproductive collaboration experiences (Williams, 2010). Hargreaves and Dawe (1989) mentioned three adverse components of a collaborative culture:

1. Fragmented individualism is a form of teacher isolation.

2. Balkanization consists of groups operating as separate entities.

3. Contrived collegiality is the dissemination of preoccupied and unwanted participants of the group.

Effective collaboration takes time to develop and implement (Williams, 2010). Teachers consumed with the daily tasks, limited resources, and pressure to demonstrate instructional competency may not find the time to collaborate with others. To save time, collaborative practices have been reduced to sharing information on computers and paper copies.

Benefits of Collaboration

A review of several related literatures suggests that teacher collaboration may, in fact, enhance learning for both teachers and students (Williams, 2010). When teachers have opportunities to collaborate professionally, they build upon their distinctive experiences, pedagogies, and content (Goddard & Goddard, 2007). Pounder (1998) concluded that teachers who work on teams report a greater skill variety and knowledge of student performance, which, in turn, improves student outcomes. A study conducted by Goddard and Goddard (2007) found that 47 schools in a large urban school district were positively influenced by teacher collaboration. This study provided evidence of a direct link between teacher collaboration for school improvement and student achievement. Another study by Goddard, Goddard, and Miller (2010) found a direct effect of instructional leadership in teacher collaboration on teacher and student learning.

Collaboration amongst teachers can be formal or informal. For instance, inclusion requires general education teachers to work collaboratively with special education teachers to provide specified learning accommodations for students with disabilities. Some departmentalized teachers work on teams to integrate the curriculum for students. Many schools have also developed support teams for teachers to identify and address students' learning needs. Teacher collaboration can even be demonstrated when teachers are discussing lesson strategies or student's needs during planning time. Many opportunities are available for teacher collaboration; yet, it is one of the least researched areas within the education field. Goddard & Goddard (2007) claimed that their study on teacher collaboration and student achievement was the first study to empirically link the

two variables. For the purpose of this study, teacher collaboration is investigated in relation to teacher learning and development.

Purpose of the Study

The goal of this study is to examine how teacher collaboration influences teacher learning and development at an elementary school in South Carolina. This study investigates collaboration and whether various levels of this behavior influence teacher learning and professional development. This study contributes to the existing research on teacher collaboration. Through the collection of data from observations, interviews, and a focus group discussion, this study reveals common themes related to the influence that teacher collaboration has on teacher learning. As there are a few quantitative studies (Goddard & Goddard, 2007; Pounder, 1998; Sawyer and Rimm-Kaufman, 2007) about teacher collaboration, this study focuses on the perspectives of the teachers involved. The findings from this study aid in understanding the nature of teacher collaboration and its influence on teacher learning. Furthermore, this study contributes to the development of professional learning opportunities for teachers to learn and participate in collaboration effectively for school improvement and student learning.

Research Questions

1. What types of collaboration do teachers perceive as most supportive and least supportive?

2. How does teacher collaboration impact teacher learning and development?

3. Which forms of teacher collaboration at this elementary school are most conducive to teacher learning and development?

The initial research questions of this study were answered using the already mentioned intensive data collection methods. However, additional questions surfaced from the common patterns of the collected data. The additional questions are:

1. How do teachers define teacher collaboration?

2. How do teachers develop common goals during collaboration?

3. How does collaboration impact a teacher's instructional practices?

Significance of Study

In an effort to provide meaningful and sustained professional learning opportunities for teachers, this interpretive study seeks to understand how teacher learning and development is influenced by collaboration. The responses from teachers' interviews, focus groups, and observations assist in gaining insight from teachers' perspectives. The results from this study add to the existing and related literature.

Theoretical Perspective

This investigation of how teacher collaboration influences teacher learning reveals a deeper understanding into social learning. In the school setting, it is clear that a variety of factors can affect teacher learning and development. However, effective teacher collaboration acknowledges these factors and seeks methods to maximize achievement of all students.

Social Learning Development

The seminal work of Lev Vygotsky (1962) suggested that we learn how to interact and communicate from others. Although his theory (Social Development Theory) is primarily based on how educators should create classroom environments to maximize learning for students, it can be used to maximize learning for teachers as well. Vygotsky (1962) implied that collaborative or cooperative dialogue helps individuals internalize information and apply it in real-life settings. Social Development Theory helps in understanding how others learn in social settings. When teachers collaborate, they are creating a social environment that allows them to learn from other teachers. Collaboration fosters creativity and integration on specific topics (Goddard &Goddard, 2007). Sawyer & Rimm-Kaufman (2007) declared that the culture of schools influence teachers' collaborative attitudes and perceptions. The school's social processes determine the level of teacher collaboration. For instance, teachers with the appropriate resources and allotted time are more likely to collaborate with one another. Therefore, the role of school administrators is integral in fostering a culture that encourages collaborative relationships.

Every school has a different cultural makeup, and Social Learning Theory suggests that learning to interact with others through that culture will enhance the learning communities within the school. Vygotsky (1962) contended that knowledge construction stems from cultural settings. Creating an environment where directed and guided interactions exist will consequently lead to innovative ideas. Vygotsky recognized that learning takes place in social contexts and encouraged educators to create social learning settings that maximize student learning and promote a positive environment.

Therefore, the sharing of pedagogical knowledge and experiences will help to foster a collaborative community of learners. Creating an environment where directed and guided interactions exist will consequently lead to innovative ideas. Vygotsky recognized that learning takes place in social contexts and encouraged educators to create social learning settings that maximize student learning and promote a positive environment. Moreover, Vygotsky (1962) states through this cultural lens, we:

1. Develop learning communities 2. Create community of learners 3. Support collaborative learning 4. Have discussion-based learning.

Social Interdependence

In the vein of Vygotsky's work, Johnson and Johnson, (2009) constructed Social Interdependence Theory. Social Learning theory provided the foundation for Cooperative Learning Theory (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Social interdependence is when the outcomes are affected by the individual's own or others' actions (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Johnson and Johnson (2009) distinguished two types on social interdependence. Positive Social Interdependence is when the actions of individuals promote and achieve common goals, and Negative Social Interdependence is when the actions of individuals hinder or obstruct the achievement of other's goals. Positive interdependence promotes individual contributions to the overall goal. Through positive interdependence, teachers are accountable and responsible for the common goals of the school and group. The influence of responsibility is increased when there is group and individual accountability (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Teacher collaboration can elicit a shared responsibility for student learning goals. Teachers that participate in collaborative professional learning

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realize benefits from a sharing of guidance and expertise; thus, establishing a positive interdependence among the individuals in a school (Williams, 2010). Teacher collaboration transforms teachers into resources for one another. Establishing a community of learners also fosters a positive learning community and, as a result, instructional practices are improved. Teacher learning is key to education reform efforts: Teacher collaboration has been linked to enhanced teacher learning and higher student achievement (Goddard &Goddard, 2007).

Leonard William Dobbs (1937) was another social theorist that supported cooperative and collaborative learning. He stated that learners who are operating together through common goals are more likely to be successful than those who work autonomously. Dobbs (1937) developed 5 basic principles that guide cooperative and collaborative action:

1. Interpersonal and collaborative skills
2. Face-to-face interaction
3. Beneficial interdependence
4. Individual responsibility
5. Group interaction processing

Definition of Terms

Learning Community/Professional Learning Community: A group of people with common educational goals and beliefs (Morrissey, 2000).

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School Support Teams: organized teams, usually headed by the school's administrator, that actively work with teachers and parents to identify individual student strengths and needs (DoDea, 2007).

Social Interdependence: The outcomes of individuals are affected by their own actions and actions of others. (*Positive*) the actions of individuals promote the achievements of common goals. (*Negative*) the actions of the individuals hinder or obstruct the achievement of individuals (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

Teacher Autonomy: Teacher work independently from other teachers; Self-directed teaching or instruction (Smylie, Lazarus, & Brownlee-Conyers, 1996).

Teacher Collaboration: (*Formal*) two or more teachers share a variety of experiences, pedagogies and instruction in an effort to improve individual student learning. (*Informal*) teachers are involved in the spontaneous sharing of communication, resources, and tasks (Mendez-Vilas, 2006).

Limitations/Considerations

This study is not designed to support generalization beyond the study population. The goal of this study is to provide descriptive evidence and teacher's perspectives of the influence of teacher collaboration at the study's school. The data collected and analyzed relates only to the selected school and can't provide conclusions on other schools, though ideally readers of the study may be able to judge the applicability of the findings to their own situations.

Another consideration is my position at the school. My experience as an assistant principal may have compromised or otherwise influenced the teachers' responses. This role of authority may have influenced teachers to paint an inaccurate picture of their

collaborative practice. To accommodate for this, I participated in collaborative practices regularly. The belief is that if teachers see me as a support and resource, they may be more open with me. Also, I recruited an experienced educator from another school to interview individual teachers. In addition, I conducted member checks to ensure that I was representing the teachers' perspectives accurately in focus groups and interviews.

I observed collaborations with openness and a noncritical perspective. The goal was to just retrieve descriptive data of collaborative practices that the teachers are engaged in. I analyzed the teacher responses to determine common themes rather than having a set objective with specific responses in mind.

Teacher collaboration is not a new topic. In fact, this topic is related to several previous studies. Collaborating teams assist in creating small learning communities within the school (Main & Bryer, 2003). Learning communities, in turn, foster a positive learning environment. In addition, a positive learning environment can help keep teachers motivated (Main & Bryer, 2003). As a result, motivated teachers can help improve student outcomes. Smylie, Lazarus & Brownlee-Conyers (1996) found that teacher autonomy negatively influenced student achievement; however, team accountability positively influenced student achievement. Their results imply that teacher collaboration enhances student learning and shared responsibility amongst teachers. Pounder (1998) found that teachers who worked collaboratively report a greater skill variety and awareness of student performance. Pounder concluded that there is a positive connection when teachers collaborate on formal teams and student outcomes.

Teacher Collaboration versus Teacher Autonomy

Collaborative opportunities are investigated at an elementary school in South Carolina. However, to truly understand the benefits of teacher collaboration, a look into the inverse practice of teacher autonomy is also explored. In this study, teacher autonomy is defined by exploring the extent of self-directed teaching and instruction. Inger (1993) contends that teacher autonomy is grounded in norms of privacy and non-interference. Teacher autonomy began to increase in the past decade due to substantial barriers, such as training, scheduling, and status differences (Inger, 1993). This behavior, inconsequently, may have led to the breakdown of learning communities and teacher collaboration. According to Rosenholtz (1989), isolation is one of the greatest impediments to teaching because it limits teachers to only their trial and error experiences.

One reason for this isolation among teachers may be the fact that individual teachers are held accountable for student test data and school administrators place more emphasis on the taught curriculum than on teacher collaboration. According to Carey (2008), the demands of NCLB have driven districts to an autonomy continuum by instituting scripted curricula. The implications are that pressures arising from standardized tests have isolated teachers from each other, and forced them to be more competitive than cooperative in enhancing student achievement. In recent years, more focus has been placed on standards-based instruction and testing. A review of several related literatures suggests that teacher collaboration may in fact enhance learning. When teachers have opportunities to collaborate professionally, they build upon their distinctive experiences, pedagogies, and content (Goddard & Goddard, 2007). Pounder (1998)

concluded that teachers who work on teams report a greater skill variety, knowledge of student performance, and other teacher's work, which in turn improve student outcomes. Collaboration amongst teachers can be formal or informal. For instance, inclusion requires general education teachers to work collaboratively with special education teachers to provide specified learning accommodations for students with disabilities. Some departmentalized teachers work on teams to integrate the curriculum for students. Many schools have also developed support teams for teachers to identify and address students' learning needs. Teacher collaboration can even be demonstrated when teachers are discussing lesson strategies or students needs during planning time. Many opportunities are available for teacher collaboration, yet it is one of the least researched areas within the education field. Goddard & Goddard (2007) contend that their study on teacher collaboration and student achievement is the first study to empirically link the two variables. For the purpose of this study, various teacher collaboration practices are investigated. Through data analyzed from observations, teacher interviews, and a focus group, the influence of teacher collaboration on teacher learning and development is explored. This study examined teacher's perspectives on instructional practices, responsibility for students' learning, and interdependence of teachers. The findings of this study revealed that when teachers formally collaborate, instructional practices are enhanced and student achievement increases. With the recent advantages, which were identified through teacher collaboration research, an investigation of teacher collaboration practices is needed to understand how such collaboration impacts teachers' learning and professional development.

Conceptual Framework

This is an interpretive study that seeks to understand how student achievement is influenced by teacher collaboration. The purpose of an interpretive study is to understand a problem or phenomenon. Interpretive research is appropriate for my study because the responses from the teacher's interviews, focus groups, and observations will allow for a thorough investigation of the influence that teacher collaboration has on student achievement and the learning environment. This study contributes to the understanding of teacher collaboration and teachers' perspectives of the impacts that collaboration has on student learning and the learning environment. Understanding collaborative behaviors and beliefs of teachers will add insight to the existing literature on teacher collaboration.

The succeeding chapters further investigate collaborative influences on teacher learning and development. The various collaborative models, teachers' responses to collaboration, and the role of school leadership with collaborative practices are discussed in the review of related literature. An intensive, interpretive methodology is used to gather and analyze the data. The collected data was thoroughly analyzed by unveiling common themes and teachers' perspectives of collaboration influences. A summation of the study's findings is included, along with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of teacher collaboration on teacher learning and development. Taking into account that effective teacher collaboration consists of discussions about curriculum, instruction, and professional development, it seemed likely that the students would benefit (Goddard & Goddard, 2007). Pounder (1998) found that teachers who worked collaboratively report a greater skill variety and awareness of student performance. To add to the existing research on teacher collaboration, this study will be intensive and interpretive as it incorporates the perspectives of the teacher participants. Unlike the existing fixed design studies, this study seeks to view teacher collaboration influences through a new lens: the teachers. Understanding how teacher collaboration influences teacher learning and development requires me to first understand teacher's thoughts and experiences about the topic. The study's benefits will firstly be directed towards the school in terms of professional development and future collaboration. This study may also influence future research on the impacts of teacher collaboration on teacher learning.

Collaborative Model

There are several collaborative models among which education organizations may choose. Whatever collaborative model is used, school leaders must established a comprehensive collaborative plan—ideally, in cooperation with the teachers—that aligns with the culture of the school and the needs of the teachers and students. McCarthy,

Brennan, and Vecchiarello (2011) suggested these steps for fostering a collaborative relationship: 1) Defining roles and responsibilities; 2) Establishing a shared vision; 3) Establishing a collaborative strategic plan; 4) Assess and adjust the plan. Collaborative learning facilitates intrinsic learning from its participants (Williams, 2010). Brodesky, Gross, Tigueand and Palmer's (2007) collaborative model for teachers fostered problem-solving through 1) Deepening the understanding of both content and students; 2) Aligning strategies with students' needs and content goals; 3) Implementing strategies with students and then reflect on their effectiveness; 4) Collaborating and planning lesson and assessments. Assisting teachers in understanding and implementing action research is important when establishing effective collaborative models (Williams, 2010). The professional learning communities model creates a model for professional development (Hord, 2004). Hord (2004) argued that professional learning communities can be understood through exploring the meaning of each word: 1) Professional is the training, knowledge, and experience that each teacher contributes; 2) Learning is the ongoing inquiry pertaining to student learning; 3) Communities are the collection of shared work and effort toward a common goal. Johnson and Johnson (2009) concluded that social interdependence promotes the following behaviors: (1) Positive goal interdependence enhances achievement productivity; (2) Positive goal and incentive interdependence; (3) Resource inter-dependence; (4) Intrinsic motivation to achieve reward or avoid loss of reward produces greater achievement efforts; (5) Facilitates development of various perspectives and creative reasoning; (6) Increased complexity of procedures, requires more effort and involvement from the group members; (7) Members define themselves in terms of group membership and contribute more towards the common good; and (8) The

stronger the interdependence, the greater the perception of collegially of the group. They contended that positive interdependence promotes individual and personal responsibility and promotes interaction.

Positive Social Interdependence is a collaborative model designed to promote higher achievement and greater productivity (Johnson and Johnson, 2009). Johnson and Johnson (2009) described five variables that are essential elements of effective cooperation: positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, appropriate use of social skills, and group processing.

Teacher Response to Collaboration

In a similar study, teachers reported a sense of shared responsibility for students learning during teacher collaboration (Williams, 2010). When teachers work collaboratively with each other, they share experiences and innovative strategies; during collaborative discussions, teachers are given a voice in curricular implementation and variety of skills to support student learning needs. Teacher collaboration is a systematic process that allows teachers to analyze and improve instructional practices and student learning outcomes (Williams, 2010). Melnick and Witner (1999) concluded from their study that teachers believed strongly in teacher collaboration and they often made time to collaborate after school hours. Professional learning opportunities for teachers encourage active involvement in the learning community. Increased professional learning is due to the understanding that when teachers work together, they express various perspectives, experiences, and reflect on their teaching practices in an effort to increase professional growth (Williams, 2010).

Teachers' perceptions of collaboration are important. The way teachers perceive collaboration can determine its efficiency. The culture of the school usually influences teachers' collaborative attitudes and behaviors (Sawyer and Rimm-Kaufman, 2007). The school leaders play a key role in modeling the attitudes and behaviors that promote collaboration.

School Leadership and Collaboration

School leaders are responsible for initiating and implementing the school's improvement plan. Research implies that school leaders affect teachers' practices (Goddard, Goddard, and Miller, 2010). School leaders are essential in collaboration settings. Related research suggests that school leaders have an indirect impact on student learning outcomes through initiated professional development opportunities for teachers (Goddard et al 2010 & Williams, 2010). Many school leaders are encouraged to provide professional development for teachers in response to improving the organization (Williams, 2010). Some research has empirically linked school leaders to effective teacher collaborative practices. A study conducted by Goddard, Goddard, and Miller (2010) found a significant direct effect of instructional leadership and collaborative practices. Their study suggested that when school leaders provided instructional leadership within their schools, higher rates of teacher collaboration occurs. A study by Sawyer and Rimm-Kaufman (2007) suggested that administrators are essential in establishing a collaborative culture within the school. Administrators, in turn, model how to prioritize collaboration and actively engage in this behavior. Goddard, Goddard, and Miller (2010) studied how influential school leaders are in collaborative practices. Their study concluded that there was a significant direct effect of school leadership on teacher

collaboration. School leaders are influential in engaging teachers' professional knowledge. Thus, school leaders should work cooperatively with teachers to encourage teacher learning and professional development.

Accountability in Collaboration

During effective collaborative practices, teachers are individually responsible for the goals of the group. Positive Social Interdependence theory (Johnson and Johnson, 2009) suggests that responsibility forces an increase in group member's motivation. The act of the members pulling their own weight to improve the contribution to the entire group is essential. Individual accountability should be assessed and compared to the standard of performance for the group (Johnson and Johnson, 2009). Effective collaboration produces an increase in shared and common goals. Williams (2010) argued that teachers develop internal accountability first and this is later developed into external measures of accountability, such as production of work, reflective practices, and goal accomplishment.

Collaboration and Teacher Efficacy

Some researchers perceive teacher efficacy as a benefit of teacher collaboration. Collaboration allows teachers to use a collection of ideas, strategies and experiences in their individual classrooms. Williams (2010) stated that collaboration builds self-efficacy by allowing teachers to exert competency of their professional lives. Self-efficacy is defined as belief in one's capabilities to implement a course of action and manage situations (Bandura, 1995). Effective teacher collaboration allows teachers to reflect on

their instructional practices and become more confident in their professional abilities (Williams, 2010).

Challenges with Collaboration

One of the biggest challenges to teacher collaboration is time. Scheduling and time allotted for formal collaboration are restricted. The schools' leaders have the responsibility to work cooperatively with teachers to maximize collective expertise (Goddard, Goddard & Miller, 2010). As mentioned previously in this study, school leaders are key to successful implementation of collaborative models. When school leaders model how to prioritize collaboration, it is more likely to take place.

There are also inherent challenges with collaboration. Take for instance the various personalities, perspectives, and beliefs that teachers bring to the table. These diverse elements can create a negative social interdependence within the school if not managed effectively (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Negative social interdependence results from the opposition and hindrance of individual's goals in the group (Johnson & Johnson. 2009).

Impact of Teacher Collaboration on Student Achievement

Studies have also revealed that teacher collaboration positively influences student behavior. Goddard and Goddard (2007) empirically linked teacher collaboration for school improvement to student achievement on high-stakes assessments. Pounder (1998) found that schools that included teacher teams report fewer behavior issues than schools without teacher teams. Lower incidences of student misbehavior provide more opportunities for all students to learn (Goddard & Goddard, 2007). With less time

devoted to handling behavior problems, teachers are able to maximize instructional time, thus enhancing student achievement. Collaboration helps teachers remain focused on the shared vision and mission of the learning community (Williams, 2010). Consistent collaboration on professional practices results in reflective thinking, improved instructional strategies, and student achievement. Thus, collaboration helps build trusting relationships and promotes a positive learning environment, and a positive learning environment has a positive influence on student achievement (Williams, 2010).

The literature expanded on teacher collaboration and the various areas that are influenced by this behavior. Teacher collaboration is a behavior that has been explored by several researchers (Goddard & Goddard, 2007; Pounder, 1998; Williams, 2010). Needless to say, this study incorporated the perspectives of teachers in regard to their learning and development. By exploring the emerging themes from the teacher responses, teacher collaboration is examined through the lens of the participants that are mostly involved in this practice, the teachers.

Academically Effective Forms of Teacher Collaboration in Elementary Schools

Collaboration exists in many forms; however, the literature varies on which form is most effective when enhancing teacher learning. Instead, the literature simply suggests that teacher collaboration, as a part of the school improvement plan, will have a positive effect on student teacher learning.

This review of literature on teacher collaboration suggests that when teachers engage in high levels of collaboration, student achievement is enhanced. Teacher collaboration can be informal and formal. Informal teacher collaboration is the

spontaneous sharing of communication, resources, and tasks (Mendez-Vilas, 2006). This study will explore the formal forms of teacher collaboration. Formal teacher collaboration as defined by Goddard & Goddard (2007) is effective when teachers come together to share and work collectively to improve student learning. Formal teacher collaboration can take many forms. Co-teaching is a popular approach with inclusion and relies on the instructional planning and delivery between the general teacher and an augmented or special education teacher. Bouck (2007) concluded that co-teaching offered instructional support for the teachers and for students. Co-teaching can maximize instructional time by incorporating differentiation for students with unique learning needs. Teaching teams are comprised of two or more teachers working together with the same students. Team teaching is also defined as a team of teachers combining talents, experience, interests, and resources to share responsibility in teaching the same cohort of students (Main & Bryer, 2003). Effective teaching teams share in the vision of the school and take ownership in the learning process. These collaborating teams assist in creating small learning communities within the school (Main & Bryer, 2003). Learning communities, in turn, foster a positive learning environment. In addition, a positive learning environment can help keep teachers motivated (Main & Bryer, 2003). As a result, motivated teachers can help improve student outcomes. Smylie, Lazarus, and Brownlee-Conyers (1996) found that teacher autonomy negatively influenced student achievement; however, team accountability positively influenced student achievement. Their results imply that teacher collaboration enhances student learning and shared responsibility amongst teachers. Pounder (1998) concluded that there is a positive connection when teachers collaborate on formal teams and student outcomes. Many schools have created support

teams. School Support Teams usually involve several teachers and other support staff, such as the guidance counselor, instructional coach, and principal. The School Support Teams actively work with other teachers and parents to identify individual student strengths and needs. Together, the team analyzes student data, creates intervention plans, and monitors student progress.

This study will add to the existing literature on teacher collaboration by assisting in understanding how collaboration influences teacher learning and development from teachers' perspectives. The related literature contends that teacher collaboration contributes to shared experiences and increased skills, which can promote student learning (Goddard & Goddard, 2007).

This study incorporates Social Development Theory, which promotes student learning through the formation of learning. Through social learning opportunities, cognition and communication is enhanced (Vygotsky, 1962). Teachers have the opportunity to learn from collaborative dialogue, which promotes the sharing of pedagogical information and innovative instructional strategies. Through positive social interdependence, teachers can attain their goals that are cooperatively linked with shared goals of the group (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Goddard and Goddard (2007) stated that when teachers have opportunities to collaborate, they build on their distinctive pedagogies and instructional development.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Exploring collaboration from teachers' perspectives revealed a deeper understanding of the ideology surrounding collaboration. This study incorporates intensive, interpretative methods to answer the following research questions: (1) What types of collaboration do teachers perceive as most supportive and least supportive? (2) How does teacher collaboration impact teacher learning and development? (3) Which forms of teacher collaboration at this elementary school are most conducive to teacher learning and development? A thorough analysis of the collected data exposed underlying themes related to these that were further explored.

Researcher Reflexivity

In interpretative research, the researcher is committed to examining a phenomenon. In order to examine the phenomenon objectively, the researcher must reflect on her/his influence, bias, and understanding of the research. The quality of reflexivity involves the researcher monitoring the influence he or she exerts into the context of the research. Reflexivity is reflecting on lived experiences both personally and academically in ways that divulge deep connections between the writer and the subject (Hatch, 2002).

I have eight years of professional experience in education. I worked collaboratively with district members, administrators, teachers, parents, and students to

foster a learning environment that is conducive to student learning. I headed the 5th grade team by coordinating team meetings, monitoring standards-based classrooms, and distributing teacher resources. As a master teacher, I assisted aspiring teachers from a local university's student-teacher program with standard-based instructional guidance and class management. My role was to develop effective teachers that can collaboratively plan and use student data to make instructional decisions for individual students. Most recently, my role as an assistant principal is to support the principal in leading the school. I implement and enforce school board policies, and administrative rules and regulations. I am an instructional leader who works collaboratively with district leaders, administrators, teachers, parents, and students to ensure that each student receives a quality and sustainable education. I hold a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education, Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction, a Specialist in Educational Leadership, and am currently pursuing a Doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction.

This is my first year at the study school. I have spent my previous years in the education system in Georgia. I was hired in August as an assistant administrator in South Carolina. My new role allows me access into the teacher's normal routines; formal observations are part of an assistant administrator's duties.

My experience and continuing work in teacher collaboration and its influence on teacher learning led to this research study. I seek to understand the motivational factors that influence teachers to collaborate, reflect on their instructional practices, and alter instructional practices to improve student learning outcomes. This study influenced my efforts for developing professional learning development opportunities for teachers to effectively collaborate and build on their pedagogical experiences.

As a school leader, I had a set of ideas and beliefs about collaboration. I believed only formal collaborative practices could affect instructional practices. I expected to observe low levels of collaboration. However, through teacher observations, I discovered teachers are constantly collaborating and sharing ideas. Both formal and informal teacher collaboration was observed; both contributed to teacher learning.

Teacher Interviewer

The teacher selected to conduct two observations and interviews is also from an elementary school in South Carolina. She has a Masters in Language Arts and three years of teaching experience. She is grade-chairperson at her current school. She is also a member of the school's Data Team. She is involved in collaborative practices daily with her grade-level team. In addition, she has led several professional learning workshops at the school and district level.

The teacher's experience with collaboration made her a suitable candidate for observing and interviewing other teachers on this topic. The teacher took descriptive notes and recorded the interviews with the teachers. The recordings were transcribed and analyzed.

Study Design

This is an interpretive study, which seeks to understand how teacher collaboration influences student achievement and the learning environment. Conducting an interpretive study contributed to the understanding of teacher collaboration from the teacher's perspectives. Teachers are interpreting what collaboration means to them and its influences on their learning and development. Furthermore, understanding teacher

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collaboration at the study school assisted in creating specific professional learning development for teachers to use this behavior to learn new pedagogy and improve instructional practices. This study incorporated teacher observations, interviews, and a focus group to explore the following research questions:

1. What types of collaboration do teachers perceive as most supportive and least supportive?

2. How does teacher collaboration impact teacher learning and development?

3. Which forms of teacher collaboration at this elementary school are most conducive to teacher learning and development?

Situated Knowledge and Related Assumptions

Data collected from teacher interviews, focus groups, and observations assisted in understanding the influence that teacher collaboration has on teacher learning and development. As an educator with several years of experience, I noticed various methods of teacher collaboration. As I inquired about the impact that teacher collaboration has on teacher learning and development in the pilot study, the responses were interesting. One teacher responded that collaboration is a way to test her knowledge and strategies. She stated that the input of her team assisted her in determining what to instructional strategies to use in the classroom. Another teacher felt that when she collaborates with other teachers, she is engaged in actual learning sessions. Another teacher said that collaboration is essential to her success in the classroom. These responses led me to the idea of exploring how collaboration influences teacher learning. Furthermore, I wanted to

explore what aspects of collaboration impact teacher development. As the new assistant principal of an elementary school, I am observing collaborative practice constantly. To make the familiar setting new to me again, I needed to use another set of eyes in my observations. I needed to look at collaboration objectively for the purposes of the research endeavor and from the perspectives of the teachers involved. I recruited one teacher from another district to observe the teachers during collaborative practices. This teacher also conducted the interviews with the teachers.

Site Section, Criteria, and Justification

The site for the study took place at a rural school in South Carolina. This elementary school is in a small town of less than 10,000 people. This site was selected because I wanted to explore the collaborative practices of the teachers at this school because of its unique characteristics. The school is also a familiar setting, and rapport with staff is in progress, which provided entrée. My position also places me, as the primary researcher, in the insider/outsider position, which enhances perspective. The approximate student population is 590 and 97% of these students receive free or reduce lunch. The school scored a ''D'' on the 2013-14 academic report card. This included very low marks in math and science. An investigation into teacher collaboration and its influence on teacher learning and development can assist in understanding how to effectively implement professional collaborative practices in an effort to maximize teacher and student learning.

Participant Selection, Criteria, and Justification

The participants for this study included elementary level teachers (Kindergarten through fifth grade). Purposive sampling was used to select participants for this study. Purposive sampling is used when the researcher has knowledge of the population and the purpose of the study; 22 elementary teachers participated in the study via invitation letters. The participants represent various levels of educational experience and various levels of success with formal teacher collaboration. Hatch (2002) contended that qualitative researchers are more likely to enlist participants of with whom they can work collaboratively in order to gain access to a higher level of knowledge and perspective understanding in an effort to comprehend the studied phenomenon. The enlisted participants are individuals that work collaboratively with others. Some teachers have common planning times with their team. The common planning times allow for convenient observations of teacher collaboration practices. In addition, the participants vary in educational experiences, subject areas, and collaboration ability levels. The participants' perspectives assisted me in exploring why teachers collaborate and how their collaboration participation influences their learning and professional development.

The demographics of the sample school consists of a total of 34 teachers, including 2 instructional specialists, 3 early start teachers, 4 kindergarten teachers, 4 first grade teachers, 4 second grade teachers, 3 third grade teachers, 3 fourth grade teachers, 3 fifth grade teachers, an art teacher, a music teacher, 2 physical education teachers, an intervention teacher, speech pathologist, and 2 special education teachers. The kindergarten teachers are assisted by a paraprofessional. There is 1 administrator and 1 assistant administrator. The teacher's experience levels range from one to thirty-two

years; most teachers have a master's degree, and three teachers and the assistant administrator and administrator obtained a specialist degree. Of the 34 teachers, 7 are Black, 1 Asian, and 26 are White. The administrator is White, and the assistant administrator is Black. The majority of teachers are veterans with more than 8 years of experience. The teachers not only vary in levels of experience and instructional knowledge, but also in race and age.

I observed various collaborative practices, from several support groups within the school, grade-level meetings, faculty meetings, and casual collaboration to gain insight into teacher collaboration levels. Analyzing data from observations, interviews, and the focus group discussions contributed to identifying common themes and patterns. Revealing common patterns ultimately led to a deeper understanding of the research problem.

Methods

The qualitative data for this study was collected using intensive methods of data collection. A teacher questionnaire was provided to inquire what teachers understand about collaboration. The use of observations of teacher collaboration, focus groups, and interviews were incorporated in an effort to understand the influence that teacher collaboration has on teacher learning and development.

Teacher Questionnaire

The questionnaire protocol was as follows:

1. How do you define teacher collaboration?

2. How often do you collaborate with teachers?

3. What topics are discussed in collaboration meetings?

4. What role does teacher collaboration play in teacher learning?

5. How does teacher collaboration positively impact student achievement and the learning environment?

A teacher questionnaire form was provided to teachers along with the consent to participate in the study letter a week prior of the study via email. Teachers were asked to complete the five open-ended questions on the questionnaire form and place it in a concealed box in the teacher work room. The questionnaire was sent to all 34 teachers, guidance counselor, media specialist, and instructional specialists participating; 22 were signed and returned along with questionnaire forms. Of the 22 questionnaire forms received, 14 teachers were observed. The selected teachers serve on collaborative teams and work collaborative with teachers often. The questionnaire provided insight into how teacher collaboration is defined and how their roles in collaborative settings aid in teacher learning. From the responses on the questionnaire, participants were selected to be observed and participate in the focus group.

Observations

Observing teacher collaboration was useful in understanding the ways that teachers share information and plan instruction with one another. Descriptive note taking accompanied the observations; these notes were reviewed as part of the interpretative process of reflection. Reflecting on notes was useful in categorizing data by patterns and check for researcher's bias and influence. As previously mentioned a teacher from

another school assisted in observing teachers during their collaborative practices. This strategy provided another set of eyes and helped to increase the objectivity of the observation and, thus, the trustworthiness of the findings of this study. Observations also allowed for a view into how teacher collaboration influences teacher learning and development. Some observations took place during scheduled teacher planning times, such as support team meetings, grade-level meetings, and professional learning. Observations were performed on 14 teachers during their grade-level meetings and support team meetings. The thirty minute, weekly naturalistic observations were performed over a five-week span and included brief viewing of collaborative meetings.

Interviews

The interviews provided insight into individual teacher's reasons to support teacher collaboration or not and how teacher collaboration is used at the school. The in-depth interviews were structured and recorded. A teacher from another district was selected to conduct the interviews with three participants. The interviews were conducted in about 45 minute intervals. The audio recordings were transcribed by another teacher and I and analyzed thoroughly. Thus, interview procedures were consistent to Creswell's (2007) recommended interview steps were used as a guide in conducting thorough interviews. As the interviewer, I:

1. Selected interviewees by purposeful sampling.

2. Selected the type of interview for the most meaningful information.

3. Recorded the interview for accuracy.

4. Provided adequate space for open-ended questions to write interviewee responses.

5. Pilot tested questions.

6. Selected an appropriate site for interview.

7. Obtained consent from interviewees.

8. Remained on topic and was respectful to the interviewee.

Focus Group

The focus group allowed me to ask research questions and gather teachers' perspectives collectively. The focus group consisted of a diverse group of teachers that range in levels of experiences and collaboration knowledge. Four teachers were selected from the observations.

The group assisted in answering the following questions and gain insight on various perceptions of collaboration.

1. How often do you participant in teacher collaboration at this school?

2. How do teachers support or resist teacher collaboration?

3. How would you persuade resistant teachers to participate in collaborative practices?

4. How does teacher collaboration impact student achievement in an elementary school?

5. How does teacher collaboration impact the learning community in an elementary school?

6. Which forms of teacher collaboration are most conducive to teacher learning?

7. How would effective teacher collaboration look? How should it be evaluated?

How would you lead teacher collaboration using student assessment data?

Based on these questions, I analyzed whether teachers feel that collaboration is influential to their learning and development, how do teacher collaborate, and what types of collaboration is more conducive to teacher and student learning.

Analysis of Data

The following data analysis strategies were chosen to address the research questions. Table 3.1:The Data Collect Design chart below displays how the proposed research questions (RQ) will be answered using the selected data collection methods. The teacher questionnaire responses help to identify the participants to observe. Observations were selected from participants who revealed a deep understanding of the meaning of teacher collaboration and its uses within the school. From the observations, some teachers were selected to participate in the focus group discussion. Data collected from observations helped address research questions 1 and 2. The data collected from focus group discussion assisted in addressing research questions1 and 3. The interview questions were also an integral part in addressing the research questions of the study. The interview questions responses for 2, 11, and 12 are of particular interest with respect to research question 1. Question responses for 3-9, 13 and 15 are related to research question 2. Lastly, question responses for questions 8, 9, and 14 address research question 3.

Table 3.1: The Data Collect Design Chart

		DATA SOURCES				
		Participant Group 1: *TEACHERS*	**Participant Group 2:** *TEACHERS*	**Participant Group 3:** *TEACHERS*	**Participant Group 4:** *TEACHERS*	**Documents/ Artifacts:**
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	1. What types of collaboration do teachers perceive as most supportive and least supportive?		Observations	Focus group question 1-3	Interview questions 2, 11, &12	Question-naire Focus Group Questions Interview questions
	2. How does teacher collaboration impact teacher learning and development?	Teacher Questionnaire	Observations	4,5, & 8	Interview questions3-8, 10,13, 15	
	3. Which forms of teacher collaboration at this elementary school are most conducive to teacher learning and development?		Focus group questions 2-5	6 and 7	8,9, & 14	

Table 3.1: The table illustrates the data collection used to answer research questions.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness in this study, I exposed my subjectivity to my participants and future readers. I discussed my background, including what led me to my career and research topic. By utilizing member checks, enriched interviews, focus group responses, and detailed observational notes, crystallization of data is supported. Finally, self-reflection journals were used to note and assess my subjectivities within the research process. Reflecting on my subjectivity often assisted me in how I interacted with participants and limited my influences in this study.

Ethical Issues

As a participant researcher, I remained open with the other participants in the study. Being honest and overt with participants demonstrates positive rapport initiatives and transparency in the research. This study only involved teachers who volunteered to participate in the study. Pseudonyms were used to protect the participant's identity. Member checks allowed participants to review their written responses in the focus group and interviews for accuracy before final drafts were submitted. By volunteering for the study, teachers indicate their willingness to be a part of the study, and by using pseudonyms, the participants and the school site are protected.

Risks and Benefits

Some risks to the participants in the investigation of how teacher collaboration influences teacher learning and development pertain to a lack of trust in me as a newcomer. Observing teachers in their natural setting may not produce the desired authenticity. Some benefits are that the participants are given the opportunity to share

their opinions openly. The participants' responses can help in understanding why teachers collaborate, how teachers collaborate, and how collaboration influence teachers.

Significance/Contributions

The significance of this study comes from its additions to the existing literature on teacher collaboration and student achievement by helping to understand how collaboration influences student achievement and the learning environment from the teachers' perspectives. There is limited research that exists and explores teachers' perceptions of teacher collaboration. The findings from this study will aid in understanding the nature of teacher collaboration and student achievement. Goddard and Goddard (2007) report that when teachers collaborate; they share experiences and skills that can promote learning for instructional enhancement. The results from this study are not intended to be generalized beyond the study school. The readers of this study are expected to be able to judge the applicability of the findings for other schools. To duplicate this study, a researcher should use a different school setting.

This study also adds to Social Development Theory. Vygotsky (1962) coined this theory regarding teachers in their creation of student learning communities within the classroom to foster student learning, but the Social Development Theory can also be applied to how teachers can foster their own learning as well. Through social learning opportunities, individuals utilize a higher level of cognition and communication. Positive Interdependence Collaborative dialogue promotes opportunities for teachers to learn from share pedagogical information and apply innovative strategies. Teachers have

opportunities to build on their own pedagogical experiences and enhance their teaching practices that result in student achievement and an improved learning environment.

Implementation of Professional Development

The data collected from this study inspired me to implement teacher collaboration as professional learning and development for the sample school. The objective for this professional learning is to grow students through effective teacher collaboration by building collegially amongst teachers, developing growth modules for teachers and students and to apply strategies that are tailored to teacher and student learning. Instead of hiring an outside agency to perform professional learning on teacher collaboration, the data collected from this study will serve as the foundation for teacher collaboration as professional learning.

Building Collegially Amongst Teachers

Collaboration for teachers is more than shared experiences and pedagogy; it is an opportunity for them to build unity and cooperation. One participant said that collaboration is like a "cohesive group." Another participant said, "That the greatest value of collaboration is when everyone come together to impact student learning."

The data collected was analyzed for underlined themes and possible relationships. Chapter four further explored the underline themes and meanings of teachers' perspectives of collaboration The teachers' perspectives of the influences of collaborative practices on their learning and development are examined.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

To make sense of the data collected for this study, audio recordings, member checks and assistance from teacher from another school were included to ensure that participants were represented accurately in the study. Research questions guided the analysis of the data. Through teacher observations, interviews, and a focus group, data was categorized by themes and patterns.

Observations

Observations were performed on fourteen teachers during their grade-level meetings, support team meetings, and during informal collaborative discussions. Thirty minute, weekly naturalistic observations were conducted over a two-week span and included a glance into collaborative practices. This observation approach provided a peek into various collaborative practices from the teachers at the sample school. Many teacher teams shared common planning times, and this allowed for daily teacher collaboration opportunities. The grade-level planning observations were organized to fit with planning periods. Other observations included a faculty meeting, data team meeting, and leadership meeting. However, informal observations of teachers were included in the study as well. The descriptive observations were analyzed for: (1) type of teacher collaboration being observed; (2) involvement of members and teachers doing collaboration; (3) topics discussed doing collaborative dialogue. The italicized words in the following represent side notes that were taken during observations.

Kindergarten Observation:

The Kindergarten team consists of four teachers. They are all veteran teachers with more than 10 years of experience. *Their paraprofessionals were not in attendance.* The Kindergarten teachers brought their Math unit plans to the grade-level meeting. The grade-level chair began the meeting by discussing the upcoming field trip to the aquarium. She gave an update of the funds collected and balance that was still due. The teachers then began to review their science unit plans to tie them into the fieldtrip. The grade chair had a checklist of items to discuss. She read two science standards and asked what activities from the upcoming fieldtrip will meet these standards. The teachers all had several activities. One teacher described several activities and lessons leading up to the field trip to prepare the students for what they will see. She stated that these lessons will familiarize the students with information and facts about the animals. Another teacher shared her activities that related writing with science. In this activity, the students will make 'fishbowls' and write facts about their illustrated fish. *A sample was provided for teachers. There was a plastic plate over an illustrated fish and writing sample underneath describing the clown fish.* Another teacher shared several resources with the other teachers. These included water animal books, lesson templates, and interactive lessons websites. The meeting concluded with the grade-chair adding the proposed activities into their lesson plans for next week. The team agreed to meet again the next day to finalize their shared lessons.

First Grade Observation:

There are four first grade teachers on the team. Three are veteran teachers with over 10 years or teaching experience, and one with three years of experience. Three teachers met during their planning time. *One veteran teacher mentioned that she had to make parent calls.* The grade-chair is also the teacher with three years of experience. She brought her laptop and the other teachers brought their notebooks. The grade-chair asked the teachers how their writing lesson went. The teachers each gave a synopsis of their lesson. *The lesson involved the students creating a timeline of themselves. The students provided pictures and descriptions of their life during that time*. Next, the teachers were discussing the children's book *Grandpa Loves Me* by Marianne Richmond. The teachers discussed several activities surrounding the book including a writing activity involving writing a letter to grandparents, a fact and opinion lesson about grandpa, and reader's theatre. Next, the teachers discussed vocabulary words to use and assessments. The meeting concluded with the team agreeing to dress as grandparents with the characters from the reader's theatre story.

Second Grade Observation:

The second grade team consists of four teachers. They meet weekly on Wednesdays. *The grade-level chair admitted to not meeting every week. Instead the planning time is usually spent grading paper and making worksheet copies for students.* The second grade teachers brought their laptop computers, copy of district standards, and lesson plan templates. The grade-level chair opened the meeting by discussing the agenda. The agenda included a holiday luncheon, upcoming fieldtrips, math, language

arts, science, and social studies. The teachers began to discuss what each person would bring for the Christmas luncheon. They agreed on bringing paper items, drinks, drinks and assorted desserts. Next, the team discussed a planned fieldtrip to a play. They decided to send reminder letters to parents. *Each teacher writes plans for a specific subject. Teachers are identified by their subject. For example, Teacher M writes the math lessons, Teacher L writes the language arts lessons, Teacher B writes the social studies lessons, and Teacher S writes the science lessons.* Teacher M is a veteran teacher with eleven years of experience. She spent two years as an instructional specialist. Teacher M began the discussion of math plans. With the standards beside her, Teacher M submitted resources on teaching subtraction. The teachers agreed that their students mostly struggled with subtraction with regrouping. Teacher M suggested using base-ten blocks and demonstrated lesson to the other teachers. Teacher L is a first year teacher. She brought a list on leveled readers to show to the others. She suggested that the teachers choose from the list of books and assigned them accordingly based on a student's reading level. She also had a list of vocabulary words and grammar activities. Teacher S is also a veteran teacher with more than twenty years of experience. Teacher B taught second grade for four years. She is also the grade-level chair. She discussed the social studies standards and her lessons on celebrating Christmas around the globe. She was interrupted by Teacher M, who thought the social studies lesson was inconsistent with the social studies standards. Teacher M is also a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses, and refuses to teach about Christmas. Instead, she preferred to teach about culture. The other teachers chimed in, and voiced their opinions, which agreed with Teacher B. The meeting

concluded with agreement on math, language arts, and science plans, but no consensus on social studies plans. .

Third Grade Observation:

There are three teachers on the third grade team. The grade chair is a veteran teacher, but is new to the district. Another teacher on the team is also a veteran teacher, but new to third grade. She served several years as an instructional coach, and this was her second year in the classroom. The last member of the team is a first year teacher. The team meets once a week after school to allow for no disruptions and more time to plan collaboratively. The teachers each brought notebooks, laptops, a copy of standards, their student's benchmark assessments, and lesson plan templates. The grade chair demonstrated to the other teachers how to group students from benchmark results. The categories were labeled: Strugglers (<69 percent), On-level (70-89 percent), Exceeded (>90 percent). The grade chair stated:

> The struggling students require immediate interventions. We need to make sure they are getting this and retaining the information we are teaching. The instructional coaches can assist us in creating interventions and progressing monitoring for the students. In the meanwhile, we need to make sure the students are on-level and exceeding are still moving [progressing] too.

After categorizing their own students, the teachers took turns discussing ways to reteach and provided interventions for students struggling with standards. Next, the team planned their lessons for the following week with differentiated lessons and small groups included.

The first year teacher did the least talking and active planning. Instead, she took notes. She seemed a bit confused. After the meeting, I walked with her to the classroom. I asked

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her how helpful the meeting was. She responded that she didn't understand some of the lessons being discussed. She didn't understand how to implement guided reading groups and stations. After encouraging her to ask questions in the meeting, I scheduled the reading instructional specialist to model the strategies with her the next day.

Fourth Grade Observation:

The fourth grade team consists of three teachers. All the teachers are veterans with over 15 years of experience. One teacher is retiring at the end of this school year. The teachers held their meeting in the gym. Their meeting consisted of planning for the upcoming annual holiday celebration. The teachers met during their planning and after school to plan songs, poems, and plays for holiday celebration. Each teacher was assigned a duty. The grade-chair took responsibility for creating a flyer for students and parents. Another teacher volunteered to createthe menu and balloon arrangements. The music teacher came to assist the teachers with music and the play. Together they planned a program including, 3 songs, a poem, and play performed by students. Student rehearsals were also performed during this time. *Each grade-level is assigned a school performance at the beginning of the year. Fourth grade teachers were assigned the holiday celebration*. Teachers sat on the stage and wrote notes as they planned for the holiday program. To conclude the meetings, the teachers discussed the scheduling of their next planning and rehearsal time.

Fifth Grade Observation:

There are three teachers that are members of the fifth-grade team. They are all veteran teachers with more than 8 years of experience. The grade-level chair has the most

experience at the school with 30 plus years. The teachers did not formally meet during the two-week observation span. However, I did observe informal collaboration. During morning duty, the teachers discussed strategies to minimized student misbehavior. To hold students accountable for their own behavior, one teacher suggested using a think/reflect sheet. She pointed out that this sheet allows students to think about their behavior and how it affects them and others. She also stated that it will be useful for conferences with students and parents. The other teachers were in agreement regarding this new resource. In fact, another teacher responded that she would add that parents had to sign the form as a way to communicate to parents how their child is behaving.

After completing all grade-level observations, I highlighted common patterns. For instance, the grade-chair on each level guided the group discussions during the collaborative meetings. Also, whether formal or informal, most teachers reported the information that was shared was beneficial to their professional practice.

Data Team Observation:

The purpose of the Data Team is to analyze data to look for patterns. The members of this team also assist teachers in developing instructional and intervention plans for students. Student data is analyzed once a month during an after school session. The Data team is made-up of three teachers, an instructional specialist, the guidance counselor, assistant principal, and principal. *District members are sometimes invited to participate in meetings*. The meeting took place in the front conference room. The principal opened the meeting by handing everyone in attendance an agenda and sign-up sheet. Each member had their own data notebook, which contained student summative

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assessments, such as benchmarks, universal screeners, and standardized test scores. Prior to the meeting, the members were given instructions to highlight patterns from their data. Members began discussing obvious patterns from the data, such as the most missed questions and standards, struggling students, and high achieving students. The team discussed some strategies that will assist teachers in re-teaching the most missed standards. An individual assessment sheet was created for third, fourth and fifth grade teachers. The assessment sheet highlighted suggested grouping arrangements for students and intervention strategies. The instructional specialist also modified her lessons to target the students that are provided support. A date was decided on for retesting the standards missed by struggling students. Once retesting is concluded, the team will meet again to discuss results and implications for students.

Media Specialist's Observation:

The media specialist is usually stationed in the school's library. Her tasks include managing the library, teaching media classes to Pre-K through 5th grade students, and assisting teachers with technology integration in the classroom. She was observed in a Promethean training workshop with Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers. The teachers in this grade level recently received new Promethean boards in their classroom. The training took place in the computer lab adjacent to the media center. The lab contains 25 computers and chairs, a Promethean board, and projector. The media specialist began the training by passing around the sign-in sheet. Once all teachers signed in, she opened the discussion by explaining the meeting's agenda topics. The topics are: ActivClassroom, Foundational Tools, Resource Browser, and Presentation Tools. She asked the teachers who were familiar with the Promethean board features. Only three teachers responded

that they were familiar. *The teachers all had Smart Boards prior to the Promethean Boards. The Smart board features are different from Promethean boards.* The media specialist asked the three teachers to move to another area of the classroom. She stated that these teachers would participate in the advance features of the Promethean board training. After reorganizing the teachers, she began her demonstrations of the various icons and features of the Promethean board. *The three teachers that were familiar with the basic features were watching an advance feature tutorial on You Tube.* The media specialist proceeded to walk around to each teacher to assist them and answer questions. As she demonstrated features of the board, she encouraged a few teachers to come up to the board to practice their new skills. *The teachers receiving the basic skills appeared more engaged as they activity participated and conversed with one another. The three teachers watching the advanced features tutorial were not as engaged in the training. One teacher actually stated that she wanted to return to her room.* The media specialist concluded the workshop by handing out surveys to rate the effectiveness of the training. I reviewed them with her. The survey asked 5 questions pertaining to the training and teachers had to rate their experiences from 1(least effective) to 4 (most effective). The teachers that interacted with the media specialists and the other teachers in the workshop gave higher scores for the training effectiveness. However, the three teachers watching the tutorial rate the effectiveness of the training the lowest. The teachers all agreed that using the promethean board would enhance their lessons and student engagement.

Special Education Teacher Observation:

The special education teacher has self-contained students (students that receive all services from the teacher) and resource students (inclusion students that part-time

services from the teacher). The special education teachers meet with regular education teachers regularly to plan lessons for inclusion students. This observation was conducted on a day when she met with third grade teachers. The meeting opened with a discussion of two new inclusion students in the third grade. The group went over the IEP (Individualized Education Program) for the two new students. *IEPs are documents that have to be implemented .for the student.* The special education teacher read off the requirements of the IEP and the teachers were taking notes. They also reviewed the students' standardized assessments and progress monitoring data.

The third grade-chair person pulled out a copy of the weekly lesson plans and the teachers began discussing some modifications for these students. These modifications included seating choice for small group interaction and opportunities to work with the teacher one on one. Students are to also receive additional support in reading and math.

The group concluded the meeting by determining the daily time students would be pulled out for special education services. The special education teacher reminded the team of the IEP meeting on next week.

Leadership Team Meeting:

The leadership team consists of eight people: The assistant principal, principal, guidance counselor, instructional specialist, and four teachers. The leadership team met in a teacher's classroom. There were two large rectangular tables. *The instructional specialist room is the normal meeting place. It was occupied with after school students this day.* Four people sat at each table. The principal opened the meeting by announcing that the school was highlighted in a news article for Math and Science Family night. *This*

event had over 600 students, parents and community members to attend. It was the biggest fundraiser in the district. Next, the principal passed around the sign-in sheet. As the members were signing, the principal brought up the next topic: Morale. The question was asked, "Is morale low?" One teacher responded, "I don't think morale is low. I think a few teachers are just negative, but they do not affect the other people that much." *Several people nodded in agreement.* Another teacher responded that morale is not low, but we can do more to show our appreciation. She suggested that the school should incorporate a "Shout Out" for staff. She explained that teachers can submit "Shout Out" tickets in a bucket and one or two can be selected each day for afternoon announcements. Another teacher chimed in, "That's a good idea. I think the staff would love that." The guidance counselor stated that the administrators should also leave a positive note after conducting observations. She said to find one or two things that the teachers did well and leave a note to acknowledge it. *The principal is taking notes.* The instructional specialist suggested incentives for teachers. *Several people responded and nodded in agreement.* She stated having jean day on Friday and comp (Compensation) time are good incentives. I suggested highlighting celebrations and events at the school in the newsletter as one way to acknowledge the school as a whole. The principal responded, "We do need to do a better job on celebrating the good things at our school. The parents and community needs to know of our greatness." *Heads nod and several teachers are taking notes.* A teacher added, "We can have team building activities before professional development began. This builds unity and mutual respect." We all agreed on the selected items. The principal moved on to the next item on the agenda: security. The principal stated that there was a lack of security at the school. The principal stated, "There are too many master keys

handed out, teachers are not monitoring their areas in the morning and afternoon, and teachers are not properly monitoring the restrooms." *Group spoke speaking softly under their breath*. The principal went on to add, the lack in security has increased the number of thefts and fighting among students. A teacher recommended that only administrators and janitors should have access to master keys. The Principal agreed and said all master keys will be turned in at the end of the week and reissued to approved individuals. The next item on the agenda was classroom resources. The principal asked the leadership team to go to the grade chairs to request a list of items needed in classrooms. *Team is taking notes.*

Interviews

This study incorporated teachers' interviews. The purpose of the teacher interviews was to support and understand the perspectives of teachers on how influential collaboration is on teacher learning and development. A teacher from another school and district was recruited to conduct interviews. This decision was made to eliminate pressure from participants who may be influenced by my leadership role at the school. Teachers were given a pseudonym to protect their identities. Interviews were conducted with three teachers: An instructional specialist, first grade teacher, and fifth grade teacher. The participants were selected from their responses to the focus group questions and discussion. The participants were provided a copy of the questions a day prior to the interview. Allowing teachers to preview the interview questions was to assist in eliminating anxiety and time to think of responses.

Forty-five minutes were allotted for each interview. The interviews were conducted in the conference room of the school. The interviews were audio recorded. Participants were asked a series of fifteen open-ended questions. The questions were designed to gain insight into the teacher's perspectives on teacher collaboration. Three themes emerged from the participant's responses: teachers acquiring common goals during collaboration, having shared ownership in the organization of the school, and a focus on instructional improvement. Of the fifteen interview questions, six provided teachers' perspectives as evidence of the emerging themes:

1. How does your professional role and responsibilities contribute to the overall organization of the school?
2. How do you define teacher collaboration?
3. How do teachers support or resist teacher collaboration?
4. How does teacher collaboration impact student achievement?
5. How will your collaborative efforts assist in the overall learning community of the school?
6. How can teacher collaboration be improved on your team? The school?

How does your professional role and responsibilities contribute to the overall organization of the school?

The teachers were asked to describe their role, and then asked how their role contributes to the organization of the school. This question response provided insight as to the teacher's perspectives of their roles in the organization of the school. A teacher responded, "I am dedicated to the students I teach every day. One student at a time and

one classroom at a time, I am making a difference in their lives." Another teacher answered:

> My training as a special education teacher allows me to provide differentiated learning opportunities to self-contained and resource students. When my students show growth and understanding of concepts, I am assisting in closing the achievement gap at my school.

Another teacher responded:

> I am part of the school's organization. I am part of this [the school] learning community. I use my expertise to move [progress] students and to assist other teachers. As a machine needs parts to function, so does a school. I am one of the many parts needed to make this school function effectively.

Teacher perceptions of their influence in the organization of the school affect their level of involvement in collaborative activities (Sawyer & Rimm-Kaufman, 2007).

Defining Teacher Collaboration

An analysis of the participant data revealed a discrepancy in the term teacher collaboration. As defined in this study, formal teacher collaboration occurs when teachers plan regularly scheduled meetings to share a variety of experiences, pedagogies, and instruction in an effort to improve individual student learning. Informal teacher collaboration refers to teacher involvement in the spontaneous sharing of communication, resources, and tasks (Mendez-Vilas, 2006). The interview participants were not provided the definition of teacher collaboration. Instead, the participants were asked to define the term from their personal knowledge and experiences. One teacher responded, "Teacher collaboration is sharing ideas." Another teacher stated, "Teacher collaboration is a collection of experiences and knowledge aimed to assist students in their learning." One

teacher defined teacher collaboration as components of professional learning opportunities:

> Teacher collaboration is professional learning opportunities based on [the] experience of teachers. Teachers come together and share unique skills and knowledge to help build teacher and student's learning potential. Together we take part in planning, developing our disciplines, and implementing lessons to students. By collaborating, we are enhancing the school as a whole because we are improving ourselves to enhance student learning. By doing this, we are doing our part to help the whole.

All participants defined teacher collaboration as the act of teachers sharing. The depth of the teachers sharing differed in the teachers' responses. Whether sharing ideas, experiences, instructional techniques, or disciplines, teachers participate in collaboration based on their level of understanding the meaning.

How do teachers support or resist teacher collaboration?

Supporting collaboration is actively engaging in it. Teachers who actively engage in collaboration report a greater range of skills (Pounder, 1998). In contrast, teachers that work in isolation are limiting their skills to only their experiences (Rosenholz, 1989). Supporting or resisting collaboration is usually influenced by the social organization possessed by the perspectives of the individuals of the school (Sawyer & Rimm-Kaufman, 2007). The participants were asked how teachers support or resist teacher collaboration. The responses to this question may be inspired by several factors. All interview participants agreed that teachers support teacher participation by their active engagement. A teacher responded, "Teachers support teacher collaboration by their participation and their input." "When teachers come together and contribute their

experiences and thoughts, they are supporting collaboration. When they don't, they are not," stated another teacher. One teacher suggested:

> Just because a teacher is working independently from other teachers, does not mean he or she are not in support of collaboration. Teachers sometimes work independently because the collaboration topics are not tailored for them or the students they teach. Teachers mainly talk about classroom management issues. How is this helpful to other teachers that have great management with their class?
>
> [Prompt: *Could the teachers with great class management assist the teachers that seem to be struggling with it?]* They could assist the other teachers, but collaboration is supposed to be for all teachers, not a select few.

The participant shared strong feelings related to teacher collaboration topics. I am not clear if the participant was in-overtly speaking of their experiences with teacher collaboration.

How does teacher collaboration impact student achievement?

As mentioned in chapter one, teacher autonomy has increased in the past decade. In addition, teacher accountability has escalated with the introduction of new standards, curriculum and standardized testing. Related literature implies that the decrease of learning communities has resulted in the decline in student performance (Inger, 1993). If collaborative teams benefit student achievement (Inger, 1993), how does teacher collaboration impact student achievement? One teacher explained, "Teacher collaboration unites experienced people. Various experiences are shared and implemented in the classroom, and the students benefit." Another teacher said, "Of course, students grow academically from the knowledge we [teachers] bring. We get that knowledge from each other. Teachers and students become successful." Another teacher added, "Teacher collaboration impacts student achievement because it [collaboration]

gives us the opportunity to refine our skills. When you know better, you do better. Better teaching results in increased student achievement."

The interview participants expressed overall support of teacher collaboration positively impacting teacher learning.

How will your collaborative efforts assist in the overall learning community of the school?

The learning community is made up of people with common educational goals and beliefs. The belief is that each participant's collaborative efforts play an integral part to the learning community's goal (Inger, 1993). This research question inspires teachers to reflect on their perception of their collaborative role in the learning community. A statement from one teacher explained, "I am a part of the leadership team, and we meet frequently to review the progress of the school improvement plan. I am also grade-chair and I lead meetings with my team to discuss ways to improve student learning." Another teacher stated, "I share my experience and the experiences of others when conducting workshops and professional learning. This is beneficial to the learning community because continuous learning is taking place." Another teacher responded, "We [teachers] are constantly learning about learning because we want the school and community to be successful."

Administrators play a major part in establishing the goals and vision of the learning community. Sawyer & Rimm-Kaufman (2007) contend that administrators are essential in establishing the culture of the school. Administrators should demonstrate the

importance of establishing a learning community that values the participation, opinions, and experiences of all members.

How can teacher collaboration be improved on your team? The school?

Teacher collaboration should be monitored and evaluated for improvement (Goddard & Goddard, 2007). The constant changes in education reform, state mandates, and the diverse population of students requires innovative instructional practices. Teacher collaboration should assist in meeting the demands of the educational field. One teacher explained, "Teacher collaboration needs to be more organized. It is hard to share and take notes when several people are monopolizing the meetings." A teacher suggested, "We just need to collaborate on grade-level meetings. We only collaborate in faculty meetings." *According to this teacher, one grade-level meeting occurred during this school year.* Another teacher recommended, "The school needs to provide professional development on how to collaborate because some teachers don't know what they are supposed to be doing." Another teacher mentioned:

We need help with learning about this new standardized assessment [Aspire]. We do not know if what we are teaching correlates to this test. Using student assessment to make instructional decisions should be part of teacher collaboration, and it's not. We mainly discuss student discipline and fundraising. I am not part of the data team, but I believe every teacher should be discussing their student data.

The responses shared during the interview suggest that for teacher collaboration to inspire student achievement, it should incorporate three factors: Teacher collaboration should be a priority of the school; professional learning should be provided to scaffold how to effectively conduct teacher collaboration; and student data assessment should be an integral component of teacher collaboration.

Upon review of the descriptive interview notes, recordings, and analysis of the transcripts, three themes emerged that relates to conducting effective collaboration: Having common goals during collaboration, positive social interdependence, and an increase in teacher efficacy. These themes were followed by sub-themes that emerged from teacher responses. The sub-themes revealed a possible motivation for the three emerging themes based on the interviewees' perceptions.

Table 4.1: Common Emerging Themes from Interviews

Common goals	Social Interdependence	Teacher Efficacy
- Defining teacher collaboration - Setting objectives and goals	- Teacher roles - Level of collaborative participation - Experience level - Shared ownership	- Improved instructional practices - Experience level

Table 4.1: The table illustrates the emerging themes and sub-themes from interview data analysis:

Focus Group

The focus group for this study was selected by analysis of teacher questionnaires and observations. The focus group is made up of four teachers: The instructional specialist, special education teacher, fifth grade teacher, and first grade teacher. The focus group discussion took place during a regular scheduled meeting. The focus group met for one hour. The session was recorded and descriptive notes were taken. The members were sent invitation and consent letters to participate in the focus group along with a copy of the questions that were guiding the discussion. All teachers were given pseudonyms to protect identities, perspectives, and their opinions. As a participant researcher, I

explained the purpose of this study was to explore the influence that teacher collaboration have on teacher learning and development. The focus group discussed the following extensively: (1) Support and resistance to teacher collaboration (2) Teacher perspectives of their level of involvement in school decisions (3) Teacher perspectives on the impact teacher collaboration has on student achievement and (4) Teacher's opinions on which forms of teacher collaboration are most conducive to teacher learning. The following questions guided the discussion of the focus group:

1. How often do you participant in teacher collaboration at this school?

2. How do teachers support or resist teacher collaboration?

3. How would you persuade resistant teachers to participate in collaborative practices?

4. How does teacher collaboration impact student achievement in an elementary school?

5. How does teacher collaboration impact the learning community in an elementary school?

6. Which forms of teacher collaboration are most conducive to teacher learning?

7. How would effective teacher collaboration look? How should it be evaluated?

8. How would you lead teacher collaboration using student assessment data?

Frequency of Teacher Collaboration

The focus group agreed that teacher collaboration should take place frequently. The members suggest that teacher collaboration should occur two or more times a week. One member explained, "Discussing the progress of students, innovative instructional

strategies, and assessment data often is necessary to improve student learning." Another

member, explained:

> Collaboration is something we [educators] do without thinking about. Whether it is formal or informal, we learn from each other all the time. We share ideas, share lessons, share successes, and disappointments. This is natural for us to share and to learn from one another. By supporting each other, we are also supporting the students.

The focus group members all agreed that effective collaboration requires consistency and

frequency.

How do teachers support or resist teacher collaboration? How would you persuade

resistant teachers to participate in collaborative practices?

The members of the focus group collectively expressed their support of teacher

collaboration. One member answered the following question: "I support teacher

collaboration by facilitating grade-level meetings every week. We plan together and

review student work." The same member explained how she would persuade resistant

teachers to participate, "In meetings, I would draw that teacher in the discussion by

asking questions. I want the teacher to feel as an equal participant and contributor." *The*

other members were nodding in agreement. Another member replied, "It is important for

all members to know that their input is valued. We share in the progress of student

learning." The perception of shared ownership during collaboration is significant.

Teachers that share common goals are more likely to collaborate than teachers who do

not share a consensus of educational goals (Sawyer & Rimm-Kaufman, 2007).

How does teacher collaboration impact student achievement in an elementary school?

This question inspired various responses from the focus group participants. As one member explained, "Teacher collaboration is a tool that should be used to examine teaching practices and student progress. By examining our [teachers] practices, we can modify them to tailor student learning needs." Another member added, "I agree! In elementary, we build the foundation for students. By collaborating, we can share experiences and interventions that can help students." *The groups discussed collaborating across grade-levels and sharing instructional strategies for their former students*. Another member commented:

> I have to collaborate with the teachers at this school when I provide interventions for their students. The teacher knows what their student needs in order to succeed, and I work on those skills with the students. Collaboration with teachers helps me do my job, and helps the students get the interventions that support their learning needs.

Teacher collaboration is essential for instructional specialists and intervention specialists. These specialized teachers work with teachers to build individualized instruction plans for students.

How does teacher collaboration impact the learning community in an elementary school?

A learning community is group of people with common educational goals and beliefs. The learning community that exists within a school affects the level of teacher collaboration that is present. Sawyer and Rimm-Kaufman (2007) contends the culture of schools can be conducive or barriers to collaboration. If culture affects teacher collaboration, how does teacher collaboration affect the learning community? A member

responded, "When teachers collaborate, they build relationships from shared experiences." Another member stated:

> All aspects of teacher collaboration should correlate to the school improvement plan. Whether we are collaborating on curriculum plans or instruction, we are trying to improve the overall structure of the school and community. We are all part of the learning community, and must do our part to help students succeed.

It is evident that the focus group members feel that they are part of a learning community. Their leadership roles in the learning community are seen as integral components of the school improvement plan.

Which forms of teacher collaboration are most conducive to student achievement?

The term teacher collaboration varies in meaning and function. Teacher collaboration can exist in various forms, ranging from co-teaching to team teaching. This question elicits the expertise of the group members in various forms of teacher collaboration. A member responded, "Co-teaching is most effective for my students because they are receiving a double dose of instruction. My inclusion students are benefiting from the same instruction being broken down [adjusted] just for them." Inclusion students are students with special education accommodations; they receive instruction in the general education classroom with assistance from a special educating teacher. Another member responded, "Parallel teaching with my student teacher is beneficial because we teach the same standards, but in difference ways. The students that are struggling get the re-teaching lesson from the student teacher while I move the other students along to other standards." Student teachers are aspiring teachers; they collaborate with their master teachers to plan lessons and learn skills needed to be effective teachers. Another response:

I think co-teaching [alternative teaching, (Friend & Cook, 1996)] because the intervention teacher works with a small group of students while I work with another small group during stations. The other students are working independently. We are able to differentiate instruction for the students in the class.

Friend and Cook (1996) presented five approaches to co-teaching. They are one teach, one support, parallel teaching, alternate teaching, station teaching, and team teaching. One teach, one support is when one teacher is responsible for teaching and classroom organization while the other teacher serves a more passive role, such as observing and distributing materials. Parallel teaching is when both teachers, usually master teacher and student teacher, teach the same lesson to different groups of students. Alternate teaching is when one teacher teaches the majority of the class while the other teacher teaches a small group of students in or out the classroom. In station teaching, both teachers are responsible for planning and teaching specific parts of a lesson through stations. Team teaching requires both teachers to plan and teach lessons to all students. The teachers are activity engaging each other and students during instruction.

A member reported, "Collaborative planning allows me to plan with my team and prepare lessons and assessments for my students. We are teaching the same standards and units. I learn new ways of teaching and assessing my students." Goddard and Goddard (2007) contend that students benefit from professional collaboration that fosters teacher's distinctive pedagogies and experiences.

Several related studies support various forms of teacher collaboration as being the most effective. However, one similarity in the studies that support teacher collaboration, as professional development, is that collaboration that builds teacher's knowledge and professional practices adds value to students' learning experiences.

How would effective teacher collaboration look? How should it be evaluated?

The response to this question depends on how an individual views effective teacher collaboration. As one member explained, "All teacher collaboration is effective." Another member elaborated, "Not all, some teachers just get together and gossip. That is not effective. Effective collaboration is seeing teachers planning using student data. They are looking for patterns and ways for all students learn material." Another member added, "I agree, teacher collaboration is the combination of ideas and experiences to serve the students we teach." Another member replied, "Teacher collaboration looks like an executive meeting. Everyone is adding their professional input for the success of the students." I turned to ask one member how would it be evaluated. The member responded:

> By the administrator…the administrator should set the standard of how collaboration should look. Maybe, even organizing professional learning so teachers can see how it looks and how to implement it. The administrator can sit in to monitor the teacher collaboration process. It can be evaluated with a rubric of expectations.

How would you lead teacher collaboration using student assessment data?

This question explores how these teacher and instructional leaders plan to lead a collaborative meeting using student data. As the members reflect on their leadership role, they are given several minutes to write their responses. One member read their response from an index card:

> My students each have data notebooks. The data is not just for me to see, but for them to see and take ownership in their own learning. I would suggest for teachers to do the same. It is helpful to have during parent-teacher conferences and student-teacher conferences. In teacher collaboration meetings, I can show other teachers how student data notebooks can be used to differentiate student learning.

A view of one student data notebook illustrated both formative and summative assessments. The student had a set goal to reach that was agreed upon by teacher, student, and parent.

Another member commented:

> I would ask the teacher to bring their student assessment data to the meeting. I will help them dissect it by which standards will be retaught, and how they will be retaught. We will talk about interventions to help struggling students. After the lessons, we would assess them again to check for progress.

The appearance of the principal or myself could have been a possible motivator of responses to the questions in the focus group.

Emerging Themes

Common themes and categories also appeared from the data: Sharing of common goals, shared ownership in student learning and school improvement, and focus to improve instructional practices.

In addition to addressing the research questions, the analysis of data produced new questions: (1) How do teachers define teacher collaboration? (2) How do teachers develop common goals during collaboration? (3) How does collaboration impact teacher's instructional practices? During the investigation, it was evident that teachers did not share the same definition of teacher collaboration. Understanding how and why teachers define the term differently became part of the examination. Teachers who served a leadership role in the school, such as grade-level chair, or data team or leadership team member defined teacher collaboration as working together to build instructional performance. Teachers that did not have a leadership role did not feel that their

participation in teacher collaboration was significant. Many defined teacher collaboration as merely sharing information. The distinctive differences in the meanings of teacher collaboration signify the difference levels of ownership that the teachers possess. The teachers that hold a leadership position in the school are more involved in decisions related to instruction and student achievement. These teachers are usually chosen to demonstrate instructional strategies in professional learning workshops. Their involvement in leadership roles is often praised and awarded. In addition, their students perform at a higher level on formative and summative assessments. However, very few of these teacher leaders assist in accessing the shared ownership and leadership qualities of the teachers on their grade level. The other teachers behave as receivers of information in grade-level meetings.

The role of administrators is critical in altering the learning environment of the school. According to the findings in this study, some teachers feel that they are passive receivers of information, while others feel that they influence the decisions of the school. The administrator can assist changing the culture of the school by engaging all teachers in decision-making and modeling what is expected. Involving all teachers in decisions-making opportunities for the school is an approach that conveys shared responsibility and ownership. Sawyer & Rimm-Kaufman (2007) contend that administrators must show teachers how to prioritize collaboration by actively engaging in the practice.
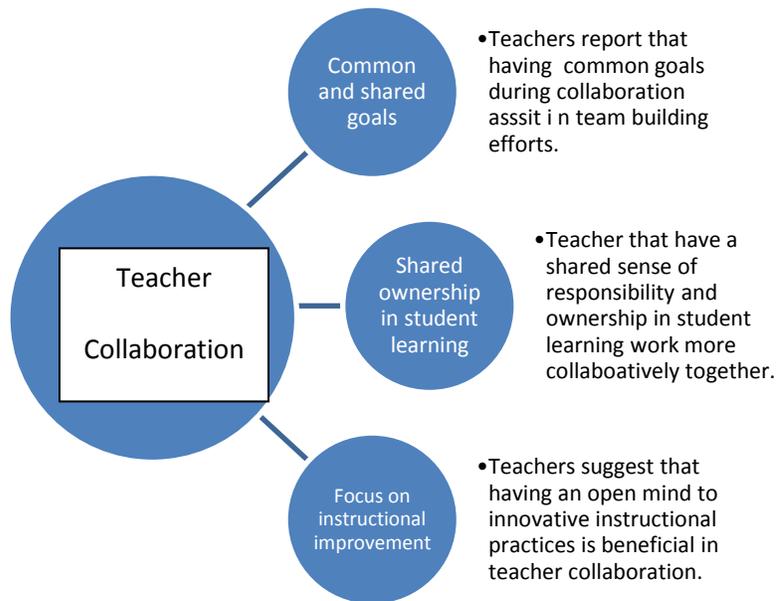
Figure: Common Themes

Figure 4.2 Illustrates the common themes that emerged from the data analysis on effective teacher collaboration

The goal in analyzing the data is to bring meaning and significance to the data that was collected. I want to make sure not to generalize, but to provide a deeper understanding of the teachers' perspectives. One way to express the perspectives of teachers is through a narrative format. With narrative data, I made connections and articulated the ideologies of the participants while integrating aspects of the Social Interdependence Theory.

Sharing of Common Goals

The participants in the focus group and interview concurred that effective collaboration is developed from sharing of common goals and objectives. Goals for

collaboration should focus on teacher and student learning (Williams, 2010). One participant reported that effective collaboration is built on a "foundation of goals." The same participant stated that the [collaborative] meetings should begin and end with a goal in mind. Dobbs (1937) argued that common goals are more likely to be successful when the participants in the group are cooperative.

Shared Ownership in Student Learning and School Improvement

Collaboration was reported by teachers to build a shared sense of responsibility for student learning. Evidence from the focus group and interviews revealed that collaboration expanded their awareness of student learning development. One teacher reported, "I can talk about things that my students are struggling in and get ideas from other teachers to help them." The participants also reported how collaborative practices were valuable in student learning. An instructional specialist stated, "Students are the ones who are benefiting from the collaboration the most because we are improving ourselves for them." The teachers felt that they are doing their part to improve student learning and school objectives. One teacher said, "It is the collaborative opportunities that put us on the same page, and when we are on the same page, the school advances as a whole."

Focus to Improve Instructional Practices

The participants in the study admitted that collaboration improves instructional practices. Some teachers reported that their instructional development was significantly enhanced due to collaboration. One veteran teacher responded, "I learned a lot about using technology in the classroom through collaboration with other teachers." Another

teacher stated, "Yes, collaboration is useful for all teachers, but especially new teachers. This is the best on-the-job learning experience they will get." Many teachers admitted to sharing resources and ideas retrieved from the Internet and other teachers to use in their classrooms. Furthermore, several teachers agreed that collaboration provides opportunities for them to assess, reflect, and expand on teaching practices.

Conclusion

As a participant researcher, I conducted this study to gain the perspectives of teachers. The goal of this study was to examine the influence that collaboration has on teacher learning and development. In order to answer the research questions (What types of collaboration do teachers perceive as most supportive and least supportive? How does teacher collaboration impact teacher learning and development? Which forms of teacher collaboration at this elementary school are most conducive to teacher learning and development?), an interpretative methodology was used. By way of teacher observations, a focus group, and interviews, a deeper understanding of teacher collaboration was revealed. Three common themes emerged as products of effective collaborative practices: These themes are: (1) sharing of common goals, (2) shared ownership in student learning and school improvement, and (3) focus on improving instructional practices.

Research Questions Responses

Table 4.3 illustrates an analysis of the data collected to answer the research questions. Similar to Table 1.1 (Data Collect Design Chart), this chart specifies how the research the data responded to the research questions of this study.

Table 4.3: Data Analysis/Responses to Research Questions

		DATA ANALYSIS/RESPONSES
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	1. What types of collaboration do teachers perceive as most supportive and least supportive?	• Collaboration that is focused on teacher and student learning is most supportive A teacher reported that co-Teaching was most effective for her students. • Another teacher suggested that parallel teaching is beneficial for her students. • Johnson and Johnson (2009) stated that collaboration with a positive social interdependence is more productive. • Collaboration with negative social interdependence is least effective to teacher and student learning.
	2. How does teacher collaboration impact teacher learning and development?	• A teacher stated that teacher collaboration is "professional learning" for teachers. • Another teacher said that various experiences are shared and then implemented in the classroom. • Another teacher stated, "By examining our [teachers] practices, we can modify them to tailor student learning needs."
	3. Which forms of teacher collaboration at this elementary school are most conducive to teacher learning and development?	• One teacher stated that "all" teacher collaboration is effective. • Another teacher said that collaboration is similar to an executive meeting and everyone adds their profession input. • Another teacher responded that discussions centered around student progress is most beneficial.

Table 4.3: The table illustrates the data responses to the research questions.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY

Teacher collaboration is not a new topic. In fact, this topic is related to several previous studies. Goddard and Goddard (2007) conducted a similar study on teacher collaboration and student achievement. Their findings suggest that when teachers engage in high levels of collaboration, student achievement is enhanced. Collaborating teams assist in creating small learning communities within the school (Main & Bryer, 2003). Learning communities, in turn, foster a positive learning environment. In addition, a positive learning environment can help keep teachers motivated (Main & Bryer, 2003). As a result, motivated teachers can help improve student outcomes. Smylie, Lazarus & Brownlee-Conyers (1996) found that teacher autonomy negatively influenced student achievement; however, team accountability positively influenced student achievement. Their results imply that teacher collaboration enhances student learning and shared responsibility amongst teachers. Pounder (1998) found that teachers who worked collaboratively report a greater skill variety and awareness of student performance. Pounder concluded that there is a positive connection when teachers collaborate on formal teams and student outcomes.

The findings of this study revealed three themes that supported students' achievement: teachers develop common goals, shared ownership in student learning and the focus on instructional improvement. These themes emerged from the data collected via observations, teacher interviews, and a focus group. The emerging themes suggest

that when teachers collaborate with common goals, a sense of shared ownership, and a commitment to improving their instructional practices, student achievement is increased. The teacher interview participants expressed that teacher collaboration encourages them to evaluate their own instructional practices.

The findings from this study also encourage the need of professional development opportunities for teachers on effective teacher collaboration practices. Such competence in the area of teacher collaboration suggests that teachers' self-efficacy will be enhanced and students' learning is increased. Using collaboration as a model for professional development encourages the relevance of instructional reflection and improvement (Brook, Sawyer & Rimm-Kaufman, 2007). Sustainability of effective teacher collaboration is the effect of having a monitoring system, a shared purpose and goal, and frequently evaluating student outcomes. The sense of unity is also evident, thus creating positive social interdependence.

Implications

This study contributes to the existing research on teacher collaboration and teacher learning and development. The findings from this study will aid in understanding the nature of the influence that teacher collaboration has on teacher learning. Although other variables may play a role in the results, it is likely that the teachers that collaborate generate positive social interdependence and self-efficacy. Teachers that collaborate regularly appear to share decision making and ownership of their learning and instructional practices. Goddard & Goddard (2007) report that when teachers collaborate they share experiences and skills that can promote learning for instructional

enhancement. Therefore, effective teacher collaboration can be influential to teacher and student intellectual success.

This naturalistic, interpretive study utilizes qualitative data as evidence within one elementary school. This school in this study has been identified as a low socioeconomic in an urban school district. The study's benefits will firstly be directed towards school improvement. Conducting professional learning development for effective teacher collaboration practices will ultimately enhance teacher efficacy and student achievement. Applicability of the findings to other settings is something for eventual readers of the study to judge. This study may also influence future research on the impacts of teacher collaboration on students learning and achievement. Such research might benefit from the focus on the student's demographic information. Consideration of such variables could produce different outcomes in similar studies on teacher collaboration. Additional research is also required to examine the effects of different types of teacher collaboration practices and larger and representative samples that could support generalization of findings. The findings from this study are expected to result in the development of professional learning development that can enhance how teachers collaboration, how often teachers collaborate, and how effective teacher collaboration can assist students academically. Professional learning offered will include collaboration opportunities for teachers. Through collaborative opportunities, teachers will create common goals and objectives. Teachers will actively reflect on teaching practices and modify instruction to accommodate the learning needs and abilities of students. Professional learning development in teacher collaboration will also encourage shared ownership in the learning process and integrated curriculum practices.

Implications for Practice

As mentioned in Chapter Three, I conducted this research with preconceived notions about collaboration. I left a school in Georgia that collaborated only when the district initiated it. Because of this, I wanted to view the formal collaborative practices between teachers at my current school. I was asked by the administrator to lead several collaboration workshops. I assumed from this requests that the level of teacher collaboration was a concern. During this investigation on teacher collaboration, I decided to not lead the collaborative groups, but to observe the collaboration teachers are engaged in. The teachers collaborated both formally and informally to gain information on their instruction and student learning. From the perspective of a school leader, I had to identify and recognize my subjectivity. Therefore, I utilized the skill of listening. Instead of leading the collaborative groups, I sat back to take descriptive notes of how collaboration was taking place. By observing and listening to the collaborative practices that teachers were engaged in, I realized that teachers were using various collaborative practices. My role as assistant principal allows me to use the analysis of the data to build on the collaborative practices that teachers are already implementing at the school.

Considerations for Future Research

For future studies, schools with high levels of teacher collaboration should be examined and compared to schools with lower levels of teacher collaboration. Other school districts from suburban and urban areas should also be examined. A study of other schools' demographics and geographical location should be studied. Also, a larger sample size can also validate the common themes that surfaced in this study. Another

consideration for future research would be to explore which collaborative behaviors have the greatest impact on teacher efficacy.

A mixed methods approach to teacher collaboration can correlate students' assessment data to teacher's perspectives on teacher collaboration. This approach can help in investigating teachers' perspectives of teacher collaboration and its impact on student achievement.

The results of this study will be used to create differentiated professional development for teachers. The goal for this professional development is to sustain positive social interdependence and aid in teacher learning and development.

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APPENDIX A

Teacher Questionnaire

1. How do you define teacher collaboration?

2. How often do you collaborate with teachers?

3. What topics are discussed in collaboration meetings?

4. What role does teacher collaboration play in teacher learning?

5. How does teacher collaboration positively impact student achievement and the

    learning environment?

APPENDIX B

Focus Group Discussion Questions

1. How often do you participant in teacher collaboration at this school?

2. How do teachers support or resist teacher collaboration?

3. How would you persuade resistant teachers to participate in collaborative practices?

4. How does teacher collaboration impact student achievement in an elementary school?

5. How does teacher collaboration impact the learning community in an elementary school?

6. Which forms of teacher collaboration are most conducive to teacher learning?

7. How would effective teacher collaboration look? How should it be evaluated?

8. How would you lead teacher collaboration using student assessment data?

APPENDIX C

Teacher Interview Questions:

1. Describe your professional role and responsibilities. How many years of educational experience do you have?

2. How does your professional role and responsibilities contribute to the overall organization of the school?

3. What professional development have you participated in? How was it effective in your professional role?

4. What are the benefits of teacher collaboration?

5. How do you develop common goals during collaboration?

6. How does collaboration impact your instructional practices?

7. How does student data play a role in teacher collaboration? Instructional practices?

8. How has your instructional practice changed as a result of teacher collaboration?

9. Which forms of teacher collaboration are most conducive to student achievement?

10. Does teacher collaboration build a sense of shared responsibility for teachers? Why or Why not?

11. How can teacher collaboration be improved on your team? The school?

12. How is teacher collaboration monitored? Who monitors teacher collaboration?

13. How do you implement new instructional strategies in the classroom? How often? How are students benefiting from these new strategies? How are the new strategies assessed for effectiveness?

14. Describe the teacher collaboration topics that had the most influence on your teacher practices? How did your students benefit?

15. How would your instructional practices in the classroom look without collaborative opportunities?