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ABSTRACT

This study documented small groups of teachers who collaborated formally and informally while working on various collaborative teams. The study involved New York City's International High School, which serves recent immigrants from about 60 countries. The school helps students develop linguistic, cognitive, and cultural skills necessary to succeed in school and beyond. Teachers work across departments in interdisciplinary teams. Each team works with limited numbers of students. Teams of teachers collaborate in and across those groups. Students also work in a variety of groups. The school has an ideological and structural commitment to collaboration, and schedules and curricula foster collaboration. Teachers collaborate by meeting formally and informally. Whole school planning time is scheduled monthly. Using observations and individual and group interviews with teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators, this study documented the process of informal and formal collaboration and respondents' opinions about their collaboration. Overall, teachers were extremely busy, working hard to achieve positive results. Their feverish pace appeared to be fueled by a tremendous commitment to doing right by their students. Many felt the pace was almost too difficult. There was a sense that teachers at different career stages contributed to and gained from collaboration differently. (Contains 73 bibliographic references.) (SM)

Processes and Perceptions of Collaboration: Two Teams at The International High School

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Too often, school cultures do not substantially support collaboration. Teachers feel isolated (Waller, 1932; Jersild, 1955; Lortie, 1975; and Flinders, 1987). Busy schedules and too many classes and students keep colleagues from collaborating (Hargreaves, 1994).

The opposite holds true at The International High School in New York City. International High School is a small alternative school. It is composed of 460 students and 30 faculty. The school serves recent immigrants. They come from 60 countries and speak 40 different languages. These students have a need to develop their communicative and academic competence in English. The school is structured to meet the students' needs. Students learn English not in separate English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, but through content areas -- Humanities (English and Social Studies) and Math, Science, and Technology. Those content areas are not separated into distinct disciplines, but revolve around interdisciplinary themes. Students take 4 classes, each seventy minutes, a day.

Teachers work across what would be academic departments in interdisciplinary teams. Each team works with a limited number of students, currently it is about 75. The curriculum itself encourages collaboration. A theme like U.S. Hopes or Urban Living* is addressed from different perspectives in all four classes. Teams of teachers collaborate in and across those groups. Students also work in a variety of groups. Each classroom has four six-sided tables. The prevailing philosophy of education values students' diverse life and linguistic experiences. Much of the learning is not about teacher to student interactions, but student to student interactions. Student work is evaluated by performance based assessments including portfolios and presentations.

The school has an ideological and structural commitment to collaboration (Ancess and Darling-Hammond, 1994). Teams of teachers collaborate by meeting formally each week for three or more hours and meeting informally regularly. Whole school planning time is scheduled monthly and recently the school joined a learning zone with two similar schools.

Statement of the Problem

In many traditional and some alternative schools, teachers feel isolated (Waller, 1932; Jersild, 1955; Lortie, 1975; and Flinders, 1987). More often than not, they are not given formal opportunities to collaborate. It is even rarer for teachers with busy schedules, too many classes, and too many students to independently take the time to formally collaborate

***The names of teams and individual teachers have been changed.**

with colleagues. While teachers might meet informally to collaborate, the underpinnings of those types of interactions are often weak (Hargreaves, 1994; 1990). Usually, they rest on the good intentions of those involved. Not surprisingly, such a foundation for collaboration can only support sporadic or short term efforts.

The reform movement suggests some school level characteristics aimed at improving student learning that also foster collaboration. Collaboration can be a lever for school change and the improvement of student learning. A shared purpose -- be it concrete or evolving -- helps create a sense of camaraderie (Fullan, 1993; 1991). A discussion of expectations for student growth and achievement as well as curriculum development and pedagogy may open a forum to construct shared meanings. Small school size affords teachers opportunities to know each other and each other's students (Meier, 1996). Alternative scheduling such as block schedules may simultaneously give students opportunities to work longer on projects and teachers opportunities to react and reflect on their practice. Additionally, rethinking curriculum in relation to scheduling may enable teachers' duties to overlap to the point where collaboration becomes essential as in an interdisciplinary curriculum. We know a lot about what supports collaboration; unfortunately that knowledge is not put into practice as often as it might be.

Like any profession, the field of education is filled with jargon and buzzwords. On the school level, practitioners, weary of every new wave of reform after being subjected to hundreds of contradictory findings and approaches in a career, are particularly sensitive. It is not uncommon for a typical teacher to respond to the latest significant or insignificant reform, "I tried that and it didn't work." Perhaps even more frustrating are those who co-opt the language of reform without truly implementing it. They pay lip service to a term or phrase and in doing so undermine its potential efficacy. Some researchers and practitioners even assert that the mis-adaptation of terms and phrases and the juggernaut pace of reform initiatives is part of a plan for administrators and others in power to retain control over teachers, students, parents, and others often out of power (Hargreaves, 1994).

In turn, while collaboration is understood from a structural perspective, understanding the processes of collaboration remains rather enigmatic. We understand in a general way many of the characteristics that support collaboration and some of its potential outcomes, but we tend not to understand how it takes place. By carefully and deeply studying how groups of teachers collaborate and how they individually and collectively perceive their collaboration, this study will examine possibilities for teacher growth. While the site of the study is an alternative school, the hope is that by better understanding teacher collaboration in that setting, we can start to better encourage it in other settings.

Research Questions

Through a series of observations, individual and group interviews, this study is designed to document processes of informal and formal collaboration as well as teachers' opinions and attitudes about their collaboration.

For the purposes of this study, collaboration is when two or more people engage in an activity with shared goals and shared processes. Their shared work is based on interdependence and mutual benefit. At its best, collaboration may be co-constructed, empowering, and transformative. Collaboration may also be frustrating and unbalanced. "Parallel play" in separate team teaching and independent work may contribute to or facilitate collaborative work, but it is not considered collaborative. While collaboration can be mandated, it appears to be most successful when those collaborating either set their own goals which surpass a mandate or, for a variety of reasons, choose to embrace a mandate.

While there are many types and contexts for collaboration, this study will focus on formal and informal collaboration. Formal collaboration occurs in specific blocks of time set aside for collaboration. Informal collaboration occurs in other, often smaller blocks of time, spontaneously chosen by collaborators to address pressing needs.

Two general open-ended research questions have been chosen to study collaboration at The International High School. The questions are as follows:

1. How do groups of teachers in specific situations collaborate?
   a). How do the teachers formally collaborate?
   b). How do the teachers informally collaborate?

2. How do the teachers perceive the collaborative process?
   a). What facilitates or hinders collaboration?
   b). What is the impact on self?
      1. personal demeanor
      2. thinking about practice
      3. actual practice
   c). What is the impact on students?
      1. personal demeanor
      2. attitude toward school
      3. achievement (communicative competence in English, academic work, social interactions)

How teachers collaborate cannot be understood by one researcher in isolation. As a teacher-researcher, I feel a deep commitment to presenting teachers' voices as the focus of my study. I hope that I can become a conduit for their experiences and reactions. I certainly value their practice and thoughts. I will encourage and welcome their input on my practice as researcher as much as possible.

My study is in the progressive tradition. I am excited by notions of constructivism as voiced by Dewey (1900), empowerment as eloquently put by Freire (1970), and collaboration as expressed by Little (1982), Clandinin (1992), Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1992; 1993), and Little & McLaughlin (1993). My idealistic hopes for schooling are ground in functional emphasis of the school change literature (Sarason, 1982; Fullan, 1991; and Darling-Hammond,1993), and the recent flurry of reform reports especially The Teachers Policy Institute Final Document (Meyers & McIsaac, 1996) on which I was a collaborator. Lastly, my deep interest in collaboration is connected to a strong sense of community evoked by Oliver (1987) and Sergiovanni (1996) and reflection as voiced by Schön (1983), Grimmet & MacKinnon (1992), Bullough & Gitlin (1995), and Munby (1987).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to document how small groups of teachers collaborate formally and informally while working on a variety of collaborative teams. The literature review provides an historical context for collaboration and an examination of aspects of collaboration.

Context for Collaboration

Collaboration in any one school takes place in the broader context of educational history. By first understanding how teachers have been isolated and how they have craved a sense of professional community, we can better understand the need for collaboration and how collaboration takes place when it does.

Teacher Isolation as Impetus

Teacher isolation has a long history in American schooling. From the one room school houses of the 19th century, to the comprehensive schools beginning at the turn of the twentieth century and blossoming in the 1950s, teachers have been separated from and felt physically disconnected from their colleagues (Lortie, 1975). Teachers' sense of isolation cuts across grade levels. Elementary school teachers typically spend an entire day with one group of students, while secondary school teachers are separated by their academic disciplines. Scientific management and social efficiency approaches to education exaggerated existing physical and emotional distances between teachers (Kleibard, 1986). For most of this century, in most circumstances, with the possible exception of lab and rural schools, teaching has been a lonely job.

As early as the 1930s, Waller (1932/1965) writes of the isolation that teachers confront both outside of and in schools. Teachers are separated from communities because of their attitudes and because communities see them in terms of stereotypes (Waller, 1932/1965). Within schools, teachers are separated from each other by pride, experience, and competition.

Jersild (1955) examines the psychological implications of isolation. He considers loneliness and the broader existential implications of meaninglessness. Loneliness is connected to isolation, suppression of feelings, and a sense of being ignored. Isolation between teachers exists on an emotional level (Jersild, 1955). Schools' preoccupation with the intellectual and logical keep individuals at a safe, but unfulfilling, distance from each other. The emotional distance compounded by physical and time separations lead to a lack of passion. The complexity of loneliness is reflected in the following statement by Jersild (1955):

> ... loneliness denotes not simply a lack of relations with others but also, perhaps primarily, a lack within oneself. They did not ask that a friend should come and relieve their solitude or that gay companions should divert them from their loneliness. They asked for help in understanding themselves. (p. 75)

Lortie (1975) describes the collegial isolation of a teacher's workplace. Teachers, Lortie explains, have restricted opportunities for feedback which contributes to the lack of a technical knowledge base in teaching. Sarason (1982) links isolation to the absence of shared practical knowledge. Not only does isolation undermine the development of knowledge, it undermines the basis for discovering or constructing knowledge (Little & McLaughlin, 1993). Teacher isolation is intimately connected to teachers' reluctance to explore and embrace alternative teaching practices which may challenge what they already do and know (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990).

If teachers are squirreled away in their own classrooms without opportunities or time to work with other teachers, then how can they be expected to break out of their isolation? Perhaps, they are not intended to do so. Perhaps those in power wish to retain their power out of their own Machiavellian self-interest. Or perhaps, they simply are too overwhelmed to think and act on teachers' roles.

Flinders (1988) agrees that isolation is a widespread characteristic of professional life in schools, but he questions the completeness of either Jersild's or Lortie's understanding of teacher isolation. The former's emphasis on psychology and the role of the individual

can be perceived as blaming the victim. Isolation is the teacher's problem. The latter's emphasis on structure and interactions which limit collegiality sees teachers as more reactive than creative. Isolation becomes an adaptive strategy for vulnerable teachers. In between the two conceptions is an acknowledgment of "the interpretative dimensions of teaching" (Flinders, p. 20).

Teacher isolation is compounded by a general lack of opportunities for growth over one's career (Darling-Hammond, 1996). Not only are beginning teachers and senior teachers expected to do essentially the same job, with varying degrees of success, but, senior teachers can often only recreate their positions by moving into administrative roles. What few opportunities teachers have for professional development are squandered as teachers are subjected to "horse and pony" shows called workshops that are often unrelated to the contexts they teach in. When these same teachers are given rare opportunities to work together on professional development, perhaps five times a year, they are not given the resources to address their development in any significant way (Hargreaves, 1990; and Miller, 1990).

Change in schools typically comes in two forms: the lone instigator who attended some sort of professional development or the entire school faculty which is being forced to adopt a new strategy (Maeroff, 1993). The individual battles against difficult odds and risks being vulnerable. The entire school usually cannot get invested in broad mandates. In between the two is the possibility of a team. Teams afford the upsides of each. While teams are not a panacea, they offer the possible benefits of learning from collective reflection and thought. They lessen a sense of risk. And, they may encourage simultaneous change in individual members and school culture.

Community as Essential

One means of combating isolation is for groups of teachers, staff, students, parents, and other stake holders, to build a sense of school community. Much of the urban school reform movement has focused on breaking down large inhumane institutions, comprehensive high schools, into manageable and coherent communities (Sizer, 1996; Meier, 1996; Kleibard, 1986; and Tyack, 1974).

In a post-modern vein Oliver (1989) writes of moving past a sense of efficiency to deep or ontological knowing. His knowing can only occur when individuals are deeply rooted in a sense of community. Sergiovanni (1996) writes about *gemeinschaft*, a special moral sense of community based on trust, intrinsic value, and collective purpose (pp. 49-53). As people interact in *gemeinschaft* their relationships are different. Thinking about schools as communities provides a specific focus. Roles and goals become more integrated

(Huberman, 1993). Leadership becomes more collective (Hollingsworth, 1994). The possibility of transformation becomes more exciting.

Building community affords a vehicle for long term professional growth and school change. While there are many possible types of communities and many ways to develop communities, collaborative work holds the promise of not just creating community but of co-constructing it. Inherent in co-constructed collaboration is an appealing sense of empowerment and equity.

Collaboration as Antidote

As teachers work with students away from what Freire (1970) describes as a banking model of education, they encourage students to construct meaning for themselves. Teachers, too, are interested in constructing their own meaning. Research on teacher isolation and the day to day frustration of isolation, have furthered interest in collaboration amongst teachers (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986).

As teachers move to become collaborative a number of conceptual changes may occur. Teachers are interested in strategies of curriculum implementation and professional development which bring teachers together in working relationships with each other (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990). Building a professional culture of teaching which is more responsive and receptive to change has become an important managerial priority for many schools and school systems (Lieberman, 1986).

Similarly, teachers are expressing a need for trust, respect, and freedom in their professional lives (Pajak, 1993; Oberg, 1989; Gordon, 1992; Glickman, 1988; and Nolan, 1989). They are also interested in working with and designing curriculum that is full of possibility and not narrowly defined. They are finding it through collaborative work that emphasizes a long-term commitment to organic change, integrated functions, and continuous collegial support networks (Gordon, 1992; Glickman, 1988; and Little, 1982).

Aspects of Collaboration

While teacher collaboration can take many forms, a review of the literature reveals that most teacher collaboration can be seen in terms of four parts: goals, resources, interactions, and outcomes. Essential questions can serve as lenses to compare individual instances and develop a sense of understanding across collaborative moments.

How are goals determined and what are they? What resources are available? How are roles determined and what are they? Are relationships characterized by hierarchy or equality? Is the collaborative inquiry school or research based? Are evaluation and

supervision separated? Is the process one of prescriptions or possibilities? What are the outcomes?

According to Inger (1993) teacher collaboration seems to work best when some or all of the following conditions exist: (a) endorsements and rewards, (b) shared leadership, (c) teacher efficacy in decision making, (d) time, (e) training and assistance, and (f) material support (p. 2). The next sections elaborate on these conditions in looking at goals, resources, interactions, outcomes, and future directions.

Goals

The understood but little discussed primary role of teacher collaboration is the improvement of student learning. Darling-Hammond (1993) writes that when teachers have opportunities to engage in peer coaching, team planning, and collaborative research they deepen their understanding (p. 759). However, as groups of teachers start to work collaboratively, the goal of improving or supporting student learning can become the elusive light at the end of the tunnel. Getting to that light becomes challenging.

Bolman and Deal (1994) offer four useful frames for teachers confronting problems in a collaborative way. The first is the human resource frame which recognizes how important it is to show concern for others and invite their participation. Change projects are a dime a dozen in schools, and more experienced and perhaps jaded teachers might need more invitations to join a project to get excited and invested. The second is the symbolic frame which recognizes how important symbols, meaning, and belief are in fostering commitment and optimism. Are there notions of a common culture? How can they be fostered? The third is the structural frame which recognizes how important productivity is. There needs to be a connection to tangible results. If it is all just navel gazing, no matter how good teachers feel about themselves, what is the point? The last is the political frame which recognizes that notions of turf and power make conflict inevitable. Conflict will happen. How can it be worked through and around?

Whichever frame a group of teachers finds itself using, it is important that the group of collaborating teachers look at the totality of their work and not slip into the rut of addressing individual isolated problems. Nolan (1989) writes that changing one problem without taking into account all of the others will have little effect. Setting collaborative goals are intertwined with the nuances of a collaborative group's belief systems. Just as some notions can be empowering others can become traps.

Even as collaborative groups start to take hold in schools and ask difficult questions about practice, they are battling years of tradition that emphasize individual relationships. Moving past a sense of teacher isolation must be accompanied by a corresponding shift in

research methodology. Nolan asserts that isolated research does not provide answers to individuals' problems of practice. The answers to the problems inherent in the teaching-learning process exist in the actual teaching-learning situation. The potential power of groups, in contrast, is tremendous, but that power lies in teachers' ability to transcend the sense of individual vulnerability borne out of a sense of isolation. Nolan (1989) writes that collaborative groups excel when they embrace notions of equality, mutual vulnerability, mutual leadership, and unconditional professional regard (p. 40).

Collaborative groups need to be sensitive and proactive about constant pressure to produce quick results that schools and those who work in them are under. Unfortunately, meaningful change cannot occur quickly. The process of becoming reflective is slow and requires patience (Sarason, 1982). Within that slow change process, collaborative groups need to avoid two pitfalls. One, that the primary goal of collaboration is changing teacher behavior. The goal rather is to help teachers become more self-directed and skilled in self-coaching. Changes in behavior will eventually come (Nolan, 1989). Two, the tendency to want to find a prescribed set of steps--the only prescription is that each group must find their own path.

Setting goals for teacher collaboration are a difficult necessity. The process of setting goals in collaboration is by no means a closed loop. As the collaboration evolves, so should the goals. How a group sets goals is intricately connected to the context the group works in.

Resources

Environment is extraordinarily important. Scheduling, work assignments, building layout, and school tone affect the breadth, depth, and quality of collaborative efforts. Particularly cogent are administrative support, time, and teacher investment or buy-in (Wildman & Niles, 1987; Garmston, 1987; and Garman, 1986).

While a group of teachers might be able to collaborate in spite of administrative support, administrators can play a major role in making collaboration fruitful. Support of small changes like common lunch or prep periods, discretionary funding, or space to collaborate or bigger changes such as block scheduling or coverages for classes may afford teachers opportunities to experiment with collaboration (Meier, 1996; Sizer, 1996; and Lieberman, 1990).

Administrators in particular control school time. Ubiquitous bells marking periods, the scheduled six hours and twenty minutes, students passing each other in crowded halls or stairways, are all connected to time. One teacher remarked how teachers' and students' lives in school are controlled by prevailing notions of time:

> I don't know how else to describe it. It's like chasing a tiger around and around a tree. The faster you run, the faster the tiger runs. You can never quite catch up, and you can't slow down either because you're not always sure whether you're chasing the tiger or the tiger's chasing you. (Flinders, p. 23).

Flanders et al. (1987) write about the importance of time. It is easier to structure time in departmentalized schools than in schools with self-contained classrooms. Here, the administrators or group of teachers responsible for scheduling play an important role and wield a tremendous amount of power. Is there time for collaboration? If so, is it built into the regular schedule or does it happen after school? Donahoe (1993) suggests that by changing the very schedule of a school to a compressed academic day, teachers and staff find it impossible to stay to themselves and behave traditionally. Teachers need time for their work and growth to be meaningful.

Time, while important, is not the only environmental constraint. A school staff must grow into excellence. Teachers need the freedom to direct their own growth, to overcome typical barriers to collaboration including: norms of privacy, subject, and departmental affiliations (Inger, 1993).

Out of autonomy comes a sense of responsibility. Together they foster intellectual provocation and new ideas. Teachers then have more opportunities to start making decisions about how to gather and assess data.

Interactions

> The relationships among adults in schools are the basis, the precondition, [and] the sine qua non that allow, energize, and sustain all other attempts at school improvement. Unless adults talk with one another, observe one another, and help one another, very little will change (Barth, 1990, p. 6).

In collegial schools, teachers engage in precise dialogue about teaching practice, teachers are frequently observed and provided with useful critiques of their teaching, teachers plan and evaluate collaboratively, and teachers teach each other the practice of teaching (Little, 1982).

How teachers interact is important. The growth in collaboration evolves from teachers being in each others' shoes. As educators with different roles work together, trust is increased and substantial questions and possibilities are raised (Neubert & Bratton, 1987). Meaningful talk emerges from observing and trying to collectively understand context.

Teachers tend to talk about their work in similar ways. Arcario (1994) looks at normal or traditional conversations between teachers and supervisors. He asserts that there is one basic post-observation conversation that teachers and supervisors have and it is bounded by teachers' and supervisors' experiences and values. It includes evaluation, justification, and prescription. While there are many ways of getting to the three categories, typically supervisors evaluate or ask teachers to evaluate the lesson. Supervisors or teachers then justify their response. Finally, supervisors or teachers make a prescription for some sort of future change. By understanding the universal conversation, divergent conversations, those breaking away from it, can be better understood.

In collaborative groups, the focus of conversation shifts a little. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1992) write about "small and big talk". The former is the day to day work of teaching -- swapping stories, ideas, reactions -- while the latter is the focus of any given project. Cochran-Smith and Lytle write that while the latter might seem more important, the former creates and sustains the interpersonal relationships necessary for the larger project. Another way of conceptualizing the big talk is to look at it in two parts: data, meaty description that brings contexts to life; and critique, discussions that challenge assumptions.

Collaborating teachers seem to get past simply asking for general feedback, to specific technical feedback, to application, to personal facilitation (Neubert & Bratton, 1987). A subtle shift can occur in emphasis from a focus on evaluation, justification, and prescription to one on observation, reflection, and possibility.

Yet, collaborative work is not a panacea. There are pitfalls to avoid. Other teachers and administrators might be interested in silencing emerging voices (Davida, 1995) . Unfortunately, dialogue can even be silenced even by those who support reform efforts. Ted, a principal in Davida's study, dragged out faculty meetings by imposing his agenda on the group's collaborative work (pp. 67-68). By constantly interjecting, Ted undermined the voices of teachers and limited their dialogue. But, Ted was attempting to support his teachers' work.

As discussed earlier, all too often teachers are colleagues in name only, without opportunities or experiences of collaboration. When teachers are able to give support to each other, they get past status quo negativism. They take greater personal and collective responsibility for their work. They build more capacity to better meet the needs of students.

Outcomes

Outcomes of teacher collaboration are difficult to measure. They can include changes in attitude, curriculum, practice, and even student achievement (Louis et al., 1996; Krovetz & Cohick, 1993).

Changes in teacher attitude seem the easiest to measure. Teachers rate collaboration as very beneficial (Ike, 1996; and Pugach & Johnson, 1995). Anecdotal comments like Lynn Nodgren's are common. "They love the collegiality that this process supports. They like that the process is directly related to their classroom and to their children" (Minnesota Federation of Teachers, 1993). Attitude can play an important role in combating perceptions of isolation, lack of control, and perpetuation of the status quo.

As good teachers are constantly creating new curricula, changes due to collaboration may be difficult to discern. Teachers speak of collaboration as affording opportunities to reflect on instructional practice and refine content and pedagogical knowledge (Kain, 1996; and Briscoe & Peters, 1997). Teachers involved in collaboration would probably be predisposed to rework and reinvent their curriculum on their own. Still, the careful observer would be able to determine a relationship or connection between discussions about teaching and pedagogy and materials collectively developed. If curriculum was written down, reproduced, or even better, collected in a portfolio, the development of new materials could be carefully monitored.

While addressing a change in teaching practice may be tricky, particularly since it conjures up notions of teacher evaluation, it can be dramatically rewarding. Poole (1994) writes of a model in Maine high schools called "supportive supervision". Ironically considering its name, it is both supportive and evaluative. It has three tiers. On the lowest level, when teachers are struggling to survive and overcome career threatening difficulties, administrators and the union play a very strong role. In this model at this level, there is room to address teachers who are damaging to themselves and students. At the middle level, the model resembles initial stages of collaboration. Teachers work with colleagues and administrators on instructional effectiveness as determined by administrators or more experienced teachers. On the highest level, where the majority of teachers typically are, teachers' self-determined goals based on reflection and work with colleagues to study and enact them. Administrators play a minimal role. The role of the collaborating teacher has been broadened to include more leadership, teachers are defining themselves differently and collectively. As teachers open their doors to observe, be observed, and talk with colleagues their roles in the broader school community are changing.

When immersed in collaboration, the overriding purpose of education can become lost. A primary goal of collaboration is to foster professional growth that will create enhanced opportunities for student development. Other meta-cognitive notions are also interesting,

but potentially distracting. Eisner (1995) questions whether they are important or even relevant. But realistically, he also questions if as a nation we are ready for a new conception of assessment and all that goes along with it. If as a process collaboration is to be successful in a field full of fads, we must be aware of finding ways to make those connections.

Future Directions

The prevailing sense of teacher isolation is problematic. Teachers are isolated emotionally, personally, and professionally. Opportunities for professional growth are limited. Most common change strategies are ineffective or unsustainable. Collaboration holds the promise of changing a sense of teacher isolation and contributing toward school change aimed at fostering the growth of students.

Collaboration, when it is supported, has potential tremendous value. Collaboration can be emotionally, personally, and professionally satisfying for teachers. Through collaboration teachers become even more invested stake holders in their schools, reflect and change their practice especially by making connections across disciplines, and understand their students from a broader range of perspectives. As teachers grow through collaboration, they become better equipped to help students grow as learners. By better understanding the complexities of the processes of teacher collaboration, we may be better prepared to support collaboration as a tool for significant educational change.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive case study is grounded in a commitment to constructivism, empowerment, reflection, school change, and collaboration. The research design was intended to be both unobtrusive and cooperative. As a researcher, I collected data as a full-time participant over a sixth month period.

As I asked teachers for their perceptions about collaboration, I started to feel uneasy about the prospect of " strip mining data". As the press of time started to surface as an emerging theme, the I felt particularly sensitive to taking participants' time to gather information. In turn, whenever possible I participants assistance in their classes. I acted as an aide or co-teacher in three classes. I helped to facilitate group work in class, I read and gave feedback on student work -- particularly research papers in history and science and literary essays, I supported less experienced teachers in their professional growth, and hIe occasionally team taught.

The relationships developed out of this approach satisfied my need to give something back to the school in exchange for the opportunity to do the study. It also, unintentionally,

helped foster relationships that gave detailed insights into collaborative processes. It enabled me to have access to deeper understandings of collaboration. Occasionally, participants said they felt too comfortable with me. Some mentioned that they later regretted opening up so much and requested that specific utterances not be reproduced. I complied.

Setting

The International High School is a small alternative school housed within LaGuardia Community College. The school serves 450 students with varying degrees of limited English proficiency (LEP). Students must have failed the Language Assessment Battery (LAB), the New York City English proficiency exam. Currently, there are students from 60 countries using 40 languages. All of the students have been in the United States for less than four years upon their acceptance to the school.

"The mission of The International High School is to enable each of its students to develop the linguistic, cognitive, and cultural skills necessary for success in high school, college, and beyond" (The International High School, 1997). The mission, in turn, is supported by seven educational principles:

1. Limited English proficient students require the ability to understand, speak, read, and write English with near-native fluency to realize their full potential within an English speaking society
2. In an increasingly interdependent world, fluency in a language other than English must be viewed as a resource for the students, the school and the society.
3. Language skills are most effectively learned in context and emerge most naturally in purposeful, language-rich, interdisciplinary study.
4. The most successful educational programs are those which emphasize high expectations coupled with effective support systems.
5. Individuals learn best from each other in heterogeneous, collaborative groupings.
6. Career oriented internships facilitate language acquisition as well as contribute a significant service to the community.
7. The most effective instruction takes place when teachers actively participate in the school decision making process, including instructional program design, curriculum development and materials selection.

The school's curriculum is composed of thematically based interdisciplinary units. Students take two long interrelated classes a day -- typically a combination of

English/Social Studies and Math/Science. The study of English takes place across subjects. Additionally, the students study their native languages. They also do an internship for a half day once a week. As the school is housed within a college, students additionally have the opportunity to take college courses for credit.

Just as the curriculum and a student's day are driven by the school's mission, so is a teacher's day. In fact, the reality of a teacher's day seems to have evolved beyond the school's mission. Teams of four to six teachers take responsibility for school governance, create curriculum, schedule students and teachers, and determine student assessment procedures. Additionally, all teachers participate in professional development through an innovative peer selection/support/evaluation system.

What helps to make the teacher collaboration possible are two or more hours of formal collaborative teacher planning time a week in addition to any informal time that can be squeezed out of a busy schedule. The school's culture encourages and even demands collaboration.

Teachers have expressed a strong commitment to the collaborative culture of the school. Each year many teachers apply to teach at The International School on the basis of their understanding of the school culture. The collaboration of teachers' seems valuable. Recent immigrants, students who are seen as both at-risk and vulnerable in New York City high schools, are achieving high levels of success. They are graduating from high school and pursuing post-secondary studies. The students' success is in some way linked to their school environment which is influenced by teacher collaboration.

Yet, some difficulties clearly exist. In alternative schools in general, teachers speak of the burn out associated with intense collaboration and curriculum planning from scratch (Meier, 1996; and Hargreaves, 1994).

Previous research addresses the richness and breadth of the learning and teaching at The International High School (Gonzalez & Darling-Hammond, 1995; Ancess & Darling-Hammond, 1994; and Lieberman & Callagy, 1990). The intensity and complexity of collaboration at The International High School make it an ideal setting for an in-depth descriptive case study.

Sample

The researcher visited the site to discuss initial plans with participants before the close of the 1996-1997 academic year. All participating staff were asked to complete consent forms. The bulk of the formal study took place from September 1997 to February 1998, though the researcher continues to visit the school to conduct member checks and attend special events like teacher portfolio presentations.

Participants were chosen after the researcher had an opportunity to better understand the context of the school through observing and interacting with several groups of collaborating teachers. Initially one team volunteered in May 1997. Another team volunteered in June 1997. Both teams of teachers represent the diversity of the profession both in terms of experience, age, ethnicity, and gender. As the groups are interdisciplinary in nature, teachers represent a range of academic disciplines. The researcher is aware of a range of possibilities for participants. They include: highly functioning and less highly functioning collaborative groups, and groups that have years of experience and groups that are relatively new to collaborating. The researcher has decided to focus on highly functioning groups – ones that meet and collaborate regularly -- that demonstrate how collaboration works and the strategies and conditions necessary for its success. Initial findings from the literature and pilot work left the researcher predisposed to examine two cluster planning teams composed of four to six teachers and a professional development committee.

Data Collection

Teacher collaboration is demanding of its participants. Similarly, it is demanding of its researchers. To continue to ask important questions of what is happening in and out of teacher collaboration research needs to be grounded in the day to day work of practitioners (Sabatini, 1996; and Smith, 1996). The challenge is to find a way to look at schools holistically and simultaneously in detail to ask and see deeply what is going on. Observations, minutes, and interviews on collaboration provide an opportunity to triangulate data (Patton, 1990).

Data on formal and informal collaboration were collected through observations of classes, meetings, informal unplanned collaborative moments, and interviews. Additionally, participants' responses to the researcher's emerging themes were documented.

While previous experiences may assist in interpreting data and understanding nuances, they may also be detrimental. One way to see The International High School with fresh eyes is to become immersed in the school's culture. Having the patience to use "reactive entry", waiting until the collaborating teachers invited the researcher into their community and specifically their classrooms, proved fruitful (Corsaro, 1981). The participant teachers expressed an unexpectedly positive interest and commitment to the project. Entry into the community was facilitated by the process of collecting background information and to a greater extent work alongside participants. The researcher observed each of 10 teachers teaching at least three times. Three of the teachers were observed 30 or more times.

As a level of comfort between the researcher and members of the school community developed, the researcher started to observe and document formal and informal collaborative meetings. The researcher attended each team's weekly hour long collaborative meeting on Tuesdays. Those meetings took place at different times. The researcher alternated each week between each team's two and a half hour collaborative meeting on Wednesdays. Minutes from those meetings, which are recorded by rotating teachers, were collected and used as stimuli in later interviews (Sabatini, 1996).

Additionally, informal collaborative moments were observed and documented. The researcher observed informal unplanned collaborative moments in-between classes, in halls and offices, in the faculty room, over lunch and on subways.

The researcher interviewed each teacher three times, each para-professional once, and an educational leader and the principal once. The formal interviews took place between late October and February. While the interviews were largely open-ended, an Interview Grid of structured prompts derived from the literature was used to focus in on specific themes. Reactions to researcher's evolving inferences continue to be documented.

Data Analysis

The data analysis is an on-going process. The interviews alone generated 900 pages of single spaced transcripts. Meeting observations and field notes account for another 200 pages. The data were analyzed two ways: first for emerging themes and second through the lenses of the initial research questions. A portrait documenting processes of collaboration, school culture, the relationships between students and teachers, and additional emerging contextual themes is being written. Data were grouped into categories detailing satisfaction, effectiveness, supports, hindrances, impact on practice, impact on thinking about practice, and impact on students. Finally, a cross-case analysis of the two teams was completed.

Limitations of the Study

Conducting a descriptive case study of teacher collaboration at one school has some weaknesses and many strengths.

A concern stems from the chosen site. Much of The International School is unique or at least atypical. By choosing to study a small group of teachers to deeply understanding how they collaborate and perceive their collaboration, the study gives up breadth. In turn, the results of the study will lack generalizability. The existing research on teacher collaboration is filled with broad brush strokes, but lacks detailed portraits. This study will contribute some of that necessary detail.

Through crafting and carrying out a study of how groups of teachers in a specific situations collaborate, the study hopes to elucidate some of what is enigmatic in the processes of teacher collaboration. This study will contribute to the research on teacher collaboration and hopefully serve an inspiration of hope for teachers struggling to transform difficult situations.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Findings have started to emerge in two categories: those having to do with collaboration and those having to do with teachers' perceptions about collaboration. The first set of findings revolves around the mechanics of collaboration. How the schedule is adjusted, how mutual interdependence is fostered, how faculty interactions are modeled to be parallel to student-teacher interactions, and how questions are raised at the school level that set the tone and the focus for much of the collaborative work. The second set of findings has more to do with the perceptions of participants and how their perceptions of collaboration play out in their teams. How teachers make sense of their collaboration, how collaboration impacts participants, and how expectations for student growth and achievement play out.

Collaboration

As discussed earlier, the schedule at the International High School is designed to foster collaboration. A full teaching load consists of three 70 minute classes. A few of the teachers do other duties that take the place of a class such as Union Chair and Guidance Counselor. A team of five teachers is responsible for seventy-five students who are broken up into three strands. On Tuesdays teachers meet formally for 70 minutes and on Wednesdays they meet for two and a half hours.

Whether teachers are teaching different sections of the same subject or teaching entirely different subjects, they are bonded to each other by the common interdisciplinary

themes that drive the curriculum. The two teams studied were U.S. Hopes and Urban Living. In each team, the theme was evident in all classes. As a history class was looking at 19th century immigration, an English class read immigrant's journals, and a science class looked at migration and evolution. In addition, each of the teams studied included an internship component which connected to their theme and the content of their classes. Finally in U.S. Hopes, students were asked to write weekly journal entries which were read by different team members each week.

At the same time that team members were bound to each other through the work they were giving students and their interactions with the same students, the teams also modeled the very processes they asked their students to complete. The teachers work in collaborative groups, evaluate each other by portfolio assessment, and take an active role in school governance. When students were asked about the connection they hesitated to make an explicit link between how they work and how their teachers work. They are more focused on their own learning. But they do realize that their approaches are similar.

Just as students are working toward graduation through portfolio-based assessment tasks (PBATs), the school is working to make those PBATs rigorous and acceptable to City and State educational authorities. International High School is one of a few schools with a waiver from the New York State Regents Examinations. The external political climate and the State's drive to support new standards are not friendly to alternative assessment. The school is under close scrutiny. In turn, the guiding question for the year has become, what do students need to do to prove that they are ready to graduate? This question comes up again and again as teachers try to make sense of it in their day to day practices.

In addition, the school is in a process of decentralizing decision making so that it is more closely guided by the needs of instructional teams. The cumulative effect is that the teams and teachers feel extraordinarily pressed for time. While the school is achieving remarkable results by any measure including attendance and graduation rates, passing rates in college classes, college acceptance rates, and simply the quality of the environment, instruction, and learning taking place, some of the fall out from the endless press to work harder is evident. Tremendous accomplishments as well as tensions surface in the teachers' collaboration. Each team exists within the broader context of the school, but each also has its own history and culture.

Formal Collaboration in U.S. Hopes

U.S. Hopes's formal collaborative meetings can be characterized as having a strong emphasis on case management and an evolving emphasis on the professional development of its two new teachers.

The group sees the affective needs of students as pivotal in their academic and personal growth. They are particularly aware of their students' needs. They regularly conference about which students are having problems and why. They involve students and families. They devise a range of strategies and follow up to make sure that their interventions work. Some of their colleagues see the teachers in U.S. Hopes as controlling of their students. But, for the most part their interventions seem to be effective.

Three of the teams five members have worked together for five or more years. They have an established curriculum that they tinker with by substituting readings and activities. As a group they make adjustments as opposed to creating curriculum from scratch. Daryl, the new science teacher, is the exception. Because this is the first year that U.S. Hopes has offered science, he is creating his curriculum from scratch.

Initially it seemed Daryl got so caught up in teaching scientific content that he might not have connected with the students intellectually. He also struggled with the perennial problem of trying to help one group of students while also focusing on the needs of the rest of his class.

Initially, at least, he got less support than he might have. The team produced a lot of rhetoric about supporting its new teachers, but some sort of an emergency like a grant being due or a meeting always seemed to get in the way. As the team realized that Daryl needed support it changed its approach. Two of the teachers made efforts to clear their schedules to work with him. As Daryl started to get more support, he took his team member's feedback to heart. In mid-course, he changed some of his objectives and activities. Doing less in greater depth seemed to make a tremendous difference for both the students and Daryl. It appeared as if a tremendous burden been lifted. The quality of interactions and work completed increased dramatically.

Student designed science experiments were a more extended opportunity for growth and development. The range of possibilities that students surfaced, with Daryl's patient support, were remarkable. Even more astounding was Daryl's ability to simultaneously support so many different projects. Not only did the experiments meet and attempt to meet International's requirements for PBATs, they truly captured students' interests and passions.

After studying teeth, dental formulas, and jaws, one group of students created simulated jaws to test their hypotheses about how herbivores and carnivores chew food. They made their jaws from the folding parts of old beach chairs and attached different size screws in different patterns to represent teeth. They then went on to try chewing a variety of materials including hay, fruits, vegetables and meat. Another group was interested in the relative strengths and weaknesses of primitive and modern skulls. They made skull models using plaster and empty soda bottles as molds. While the primitive skulls were one piece, the modern skulls ranged from having two to five pieces glued together. The students dropped the skull models from varying heights to determine their strength.

As a new teacher Jane encountered some of the problems Daryl did, but her work focused on refining an existing history curriculum. As a gifted curriculum writer working from an established curriculum, Jane was largely self-sufficient. She revised and adapted pieces as necessary. As she created materials from scratch, she did so in the context of an existing curriculum. Jane's most pressing needs revolved around implementing her stellar curriculum in her classes. As the team started to realize some of Jane's needs in this area, they adjusted their schedules to enable Jane to team teach with a more experienced teacher.

Besides focusing of the support and development of its two new teachers, in formal collaborative meetings U.S. Hopes dealt with what they liked to call "administrivia", the necessary administrative tasks imposed by the school and the Board of Education. They tackled forms, requests, internship placements, and ordering supplies to name a few. To a lesser extent, they also used their formal meetings as an opportunity for collaborative planning especially around whole team activities like trips, programming, and portfolio evaluation and mentoring.

Formal Collaboration in Urban Living

Urban Living's formal collaborative meetings can be characterized as having a strong emphasis on curriculum development. Two of its teachers have been teaching for more than twenty years, two for more than five years, and one is in her second year. The team is in the process of solidifying its curriculum so much of their time is spent exchanging ideas. They seem to collaborate in two ways around curriculum development. Either they work as a whole group to co-create curriculum or they ask for feedback after completing work individually or as part of a sub-group.

Whole group projects include the development of a Me-Shirt activity. At the beginning of the year the entire team created an activity for students to assess their values and introduce themselves to each other and their teachers. The activity asked students to fill in a blank T-shirt with values, characteristics and hobbies they valued. Another activity, The

Turkey Factory, was designed by the whole team. In the middle of a unit on labor history, the teachers decided that students needed an opportunity to see the difference between how artisans and factory workers work. With Thanksgiving fast approaching, they had students create turkey decorations. Half of each class became artisans and half became factory workers. All the teachers were involved in the smallest details in design from the time allotted to the shape and size of the turkey beaks.

Teachers seem to ask for feedback on projects when time is short or when they are particularly invested in their own approach. Again as the team was working through labor history, an opportunity arose to have the students do roles play based on factory workers lives. Each of three teachers approached the task differently. Tim with a background in drama created elaborate motivations for his students, Luz had very structured roles, and Rhonda, working with the researcher, created a guided but largely open-ended activity. As students were preparing to write their literary essays, one of the PBATs, a similar process occurred. Each teacher was willing to exchange ideas and gather suggestions, but in the end each teacher approached the activity based on their own experiences and personal preferences.

Occasionally these preferences can surface as a rift between members of the team. It happens that a disagreement over a year ago about a student's eligibility for graduation has never been resolved. Coincidentally, the two teachers involved taught different disciplines, English/social studies and math/science. A lack of trust that came out of that disagreement seems to support a split between humanities and math. While the team can work together, it seems equally happy to work in two sub-groups, humanities teachers and math/science teachers.

The team also copes with its share of administrivia. In addition to what other teams face, three members of the team hold school-wide responsibilities for internships, the library, drama and student government. Administrivia has its own pull. It usually needs to be addressed quickly, it has an end point, and in some ways is satisfying to complete.

Finally, the team has a focus on case management. The teachers tend to set high expectations for their students and then hold them accountable for their behavior and achievement. While other teams might collectively address the needs of students together, Urban Living spends its formal collaborative meetings addressing its expectations for students. It deals with students needs through individual counseling.

Informal Collaboration in U.S. Hopes and Urban Living

Informal collaboration in both U.S. Hopes and Urban Living occurs when teachers feel a need to plan collaboratively or get or give support. In U.S. Hopes, informal collaborative

planning happens especially with Daryl and Jane. In Urban Living, Luz, the second year teacher, asks for and gets more support. Additionally, across both teams informal collaboration tends to occur around issues of case management. Pressing needs of students cannot wait for regularly scheduled meetings.

Teachers venture outside of their teams to informally collaborate for a variety of reasons which include: curriculum, space, school wide committees and hiring. Spontaneous meetings have occured on how to work against overlap in clusters.

Finally, teachers tend to informally collaborate with their friends. Personal conversations carry over into curriculum and case management. Places like the teachers' room, the restaurant across of the street, and the tennis court became a place to create ideas and refine activities.

Teachers' Perceptions of Collaboration

At this early stage in data analysis, how teachers make sense of their collaboration and how collaboration impacts participants plays out in three areas. A majority of teachers are seriously concerned about the press of time, their expectations for students and what they get out of collaborating.

Teachers at International High School are remarkably busy. They work very hard to achieve positive results. Throughout the year, at different moments individuals seemed to hit the wall. Teachers would make it to vacation or simply the end of a week and then collapse. A tension exists between a sense of being burdened and overworked versus a sense of being excited and reenergized. Occasionally, teachers feel dumped on by administrative duties and guidance responsibilities. Most of all, teachers talk about their increasing duties and how the model is becoming unsustainable. Their feverish pace seems to be fueled by a tremendous commitment to doing right by their students.

Through their collaboration, teachers set high expectations for student growth and achievement. The teachers are very invested in their students' accomplishments. When students succeed, teachers are elated. When students fail, they feel guilty. These feelings seem to be magnified in their collaborative groups.

Lastly, there is a sense that teachers at different stages in their careers contribute to and gain from collaboration differently. Daryl and Jane clearly gain support and ideas from their more experienced colleagues. Those colleagues also gain support and ideas from Daryl and Jane. Additionally, the more experienced teachers spoke of the excitement and variety that comes from collaboration. One of the teachers encouraged her group to become part of this study simply because she thought it would provoke interesting self-reflection and discussion. Collaboration is attractive to experienced teachers in part

because it breaks up the potential monotony. After twenty years of teaching, she has largely mastered classroom instruction and is looking for other growth opportunities.

Nancy, another experienced teacher, works with student teachers for the same reason. She is not interested in whole school politics and the machinations surrounding them, but she is interested in sharing her craft and getting reflections on what is happening in her classroom.

Additional Areas of Inquiry

As the data analysis continues and as observations and interview responses are reviewed and arranged more closely, additional themes and details are likely to emerge. At this point, important questions remaining to be examined are: How does leadership emerge in collaboration? When? In what areas? Are there common roles that people in each team play -- facilitator, recorder, creator, focuser, blocker, unengager? Why do some people work within their team while others seem to work more in a whole school way?

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Lawrence M. Rudner, Ph.D.
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