

## **A Case Study of Collaboration between a Drama Specialist and Early Childhood Classroom Teachers in an Early Childhood Drama Program**

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### **Abstract**

This article presents findings from a qualitative case study of a 9-week collaborative early childhood drama education program. It focuses on collaborations between a drama specialist and two early childhood classroom teachers at a private school in the Midwestern United States. A full-time drama specialist with educational background and professional experience in drama and two experienced early childhood teachers were the main participants. Analysis illustrates the participant teachers' roles, expectations, and interactions with each other. The results identify specific aspects that hindered the collaborative process at the individual teacher level (unclearly defined leadership, the lack of communication, and perceptions of insider versus outsider) and at the institutional level (the absence of school regulations and support). Suggestions including structured school-wide support and incentives in addition to individual teachers' efforts for a successful collaboration are provided.

### **Keywords**

Collaboration, drama specialist, drama program, early childhood, communication

### **Introduction**

Collaborative teaching in the early childhood classroom can benefit children and teachers alike. Especially in specialized areas such as drama where classroom teachers may often lack formal training, collaboration can lead to improved curriculum and enhance teachers' instructional abilities. However, due to the intricacies of collaboration including complexity of interactions, conflicting expectations and goals, and altering roles and responsibilities, teachers can experience difficulties and hindrances in the collaborative process. This paper examines how a drama specialist and two classroom teachers worked together in an early childhood drama program in order to gain insights on factors that can help to ensure a successful collaboration. In an early childhood classroom, the single discipline collaboration where two or more teachers from the same subject area instruct a common set of students is prevalent as exemplified by a head teacher working with an assistant teacher in one classroom (Singer, 1964). Interdisciplinary collaboration, while not as common, can also play an important role in early childhood education. Early childhood teaching is often dismissed as being easy because the contents covered are not as sophisticated as those of middle school or high school levels (Jalongo & Isenberg, 2011). However, an extensive body of research confirms that teachers need expansive knowledge in order to produce quality outcomes for young children (Fukkink & Lont, 2007; Lowe Vandall & Wolfe, 2000; Marshall, 2004). With little or no specialized knowledge in certain disciplines, classroom teachers are not likely to perform optimally in all subjects. Collaboration can be especially beneficial in such cases. In the context of curriculum development, collaboration is defined as the "mutual guiding of the educational process by participants" (Rankin, 1997, p. 72). Collaboration can not only improve teachers' instructional

abilities and effectiveness but also provide a more integrated, cross-disciplinary curriculum for students (Bresler, 2003).

Drama education consists of specialized discipline-based knowledge that most American early childhood educators are not trained in (Wee, 2009). Numerous scholars have stressed the importance of drama education for young children. Drama is powerful in that it can help introduce young children to the world around them. It helps them to face the necessities of taking into account what others think, feel, and say because it involves working with others and acting out life issues (O'Neill, 1995). Toye and Prendiville (2000) argued that drama education, both as an art and as an experiential way of learning, not only conforms to contemporary theories of how children learn, grow, and develop, but also engages children in a holistic education. Neelands (2000) emphasized that using drama takes teachers beyond merely transferring knowledge and building skills because it involves negotiating meaning to gain understanding. Drama education is particularly important in early childhood because young children learn their world using their senses and motors/movements, which are the main tools of drama education (Osmond, 2007). Drama activities provide children with opportunities to express their thoughts and feelings by using all of these senses and to develop their own perceptions about themselves and the world around them (Brizendne & Thomas, 1982; McCaslin, 1987).

Despite these essential benefits to early childhood development, the actual practice of drama education has been rare in the United States. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, drama/theatre instruction was only available at 19 percent of 640 public elementary schools surveyed in the United States in 2002 and merely 16 percent of these schools employed full-time specialists in drama/theater. Limited financial resources, scarcity of state-mandated curriculum guides (Leonhard, 1991), and teachers' concerns about vast amount of preparation time (McMaster, 1998) were reported to hinder classroom teachers from incorporating drama in their curriculum.

By bringing different knowledge and experiences into the classroom, collaboration between a drama specialist and a classroom teacher can be an especially valuable approach to expanding and complementing teachers' specialties (e.g., DeMoss & Morris, 2002; McCammon & Betts, 1995). With respect specifically to drama, collaboration can provide a strong foundation in drama skills and techniques such that drama becomes an integral part of the teacher's repertoire (Yaffe, 1989). Yet, despite its importance in early childhood education, only a limited number of studies on collaboration between a classroom teacher and an experienced drama educator exists (e.g., DeMoss & Morris, 2002; McCammon & Betts, 1995). These studies have focused mainly on elementary to high school levels but drama education may be even more important in early childhood where young children learn through senses and body movements. These studies have also focused on collaborations with practicing drama artists, rather than full-time drama specialists. It is important to investigate how full-time drama specialists work with classroom teachers because they may work differently from artists-in-residence. In many cases, artists-in-residence are in each classroom for 3-4 sessions and are under considerable time constraints (Kind, de Cosson, Irwin, & Grauer, 2007), which can limit depth of partnership (Burnaford, April & Weiss, 2001; Catterall & Waldorf, 1999). Arts specialists, on the other hand, can develop different partnerships and relationships with classroom teachers from artists-in-residence by teaching each class in rotation and being more involved in the school system (Bresler, DeStefano, Feldman, & Garg, 2000; de Cosson, Grauer, Irwin, & Kind, 2005). Furthermore, conflicts and difficulties teachers can have in collaboration, understanding of which is critical in achieving a successful collaboration, have not been addressed in previous studies. Thus, it is critical to identify and articulate what the necessary ingredients are for a successful collaboration and what measures can be taken to prevent unfruitful results.

This research examines collaborations between one drama specialist and two experienced early childhood classroom teachers (one kindergarten and one first-grade) for a 9-week drama program. Specifically, it focuses on the participant teachers' roles, expectations, and interactions with each other. Specific aspects that hinder collaboration are identified at the individual teacher level and at the institutional level. Conflicts and difficulties at the individual teacher level include unclearly defined leadership, lack of communication, and teachers' perceptions of insider versus outsider. Institutional level concerns include a lack of regulations and support at school. Based on these findings, suggestions to achieve successful collaborations are articulated.

### **Collaboration between Teachers**

Contrary to theatre education, which highlights training for formal performance, drama education emphasizes participants' exploratory and meaning-making process (Schonmann, 2002). Drama can involve working with other children and acting out what others think, feel, and say, which exposes the children to new worlds of feeling and contemplation (O'Neill, 1995). This article focuses specifically on interdisciplinary collaboration, which is defined as collaboration between teachers with different specializations who are given a common block of time to instruct a common set of students in classes of flexible size (Singer, 1964).

In the United States, teaching as work has been traditionally considered to be carried out autonomously, isolated from colleagues (Little, 1990; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). During the past two decades, there has been a movement to counteract the traditional privacy and isolation of U.S. teachers by promoting collaboration (Levin & Marcus, 2010). *Communities of Practice* by Wenger (1998) offers an important insight for teachers working together. Wenger claims that an association between practice of teaching and community yields a more tractable characterization of the concept of practice and defines a special type of community. To associate practice and community, Wenger describes three dimensions of relations by which practice is the source of coherence of a community by providing a mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire. First, mutual engagement involves teachers' working together and negotiating meaning with each other. Diversity in a community, such as different expertise, educational backgrounds, and professional experiences makes engagement in practice more productive. Joint enterprise involves teachers' negotiating the meanings and vocabulary tied to a given task or activity. Because mutual engagement does not require homogeneity, a joint enterprise does not always mean agreement but needs to be negotiated by the community. Shared repertoire involves broad aspects from routines to concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence.

Thus, a community of practice enters into the experience of participants through their mutual engagement. Relations of mutual accountability can be created by a joint enterprise. Shared histories of engagement can become resources for negotiation of meanings. Communities with mutual engagement, interpersonal relations, shared knowledge, and negotiation of enterprise hold the key to real transformation. Within the context of collaboration, teachers with different specialties can learn from observing, asking questions, and participating alongside others with different experiences. Teachers are engaged in jointly constructing, transforming, conserving, and/or negotiating the meanings of practices. By doing so, shared repertoire involves a wide variety of teaching practices.

Not surprisingly, a small but a growing body of research has shown that collaboration impacts teaching practices (Vescio, Ross, & Adam, 2008). Well-structured instructions of respective specialized areas of the teachers (DeMoss & Morris, 2002; McCammon & Betts, 1995), complementary personalities, detailed and frequent communication (Freeman, 1992), and a supportive and collegial school atmosphere (Achinstein, 2002) all contribute to a successful

collaboration. High levels of commitment, energy, enthusiasm, and innovation in teaching are reported as important factors for cohesive and collegial collaboration (McLaughlin, 1993). Students benefit from collaboration by being exposed to a holistic and an experiential learning and by developing a deeper understanding with higher-order thinking (Mansilla, 2005; Patterson, 2002).

Although positive effects of collaboration have often been highlighted, drawbacks or difficulties have been pointed out only in a limited number of studies. Lerner and Tiedens (2006) identify that the combination of a focus on weaknesses and a tendency to attribute negative intentions to others could be a significant threat to a successful collaboration. Negative aspects of collaboration can cause communities of practice to exclude and to resist innovation (e.g., Fendler, 2006; Parks, 2008), which in turn lead to less effective teaching. Although problems that hinder positive outcomes must be identified in order to benefit from collaborative teaching efforts, studies discussing difficulties and drawbacks in the course of collaboration between early childhood teachers and arts (including drama) specialists are very rare. Thus, it is critical to examine and to articulate difficulties and concerns during the collaborative process. Moreover, strategies to avoid or solve these problems need to be developed.

## **Methods**

In order to examine potential barriers to successful collaborations between a drama specialist and two classroom teachers, a qualitative case study method (Stake, 2006) was used. A case study method is defined as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Stake, 1995). Case study emphasizes detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships. This method enabled the exploration of the collaboration process in its natural setting and the examination of the teachers' actions and perceptions over time to be tracked in an open and flexible manner. Using the case study was considered as the most appropriate for this research because it enabled the researcher to be deeply involved in the structure, the whole creative processes, and the outcomes of the project (Carroll, 1996; Yin, 2003), which allowed exploration of multifaceted interactions between the teachers and the complex process of collaboration.

## **Setting**

The data for this research were collected at Bailey School (a pseudonym), a private school located near a metropolitan city in the Midwestern United States. Bailey School served a total of 310 students from pre-kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade and employed 36 faculty members at the time of this research (fall 2007). The school satisfied three requirements necessary for this research: 1) drama education was provided to young children in an early childhood program, 2) drama education was taught by a drama specialist with specialized knowledge of drama and professional experiences in drama/theatre, and 3) the school valued collaboration between teachers as evident from the school core beliefs at the official school Web site (e.g., "Bailey faculty collaborate to integrate curriculum across varied discipline, including fine arts, physical education, language and information literacy") and an interview with the school director (e.g., "Bailey faculty is strongly encouraged to collaborate with each other, within teams and across teams, and as well as with members of the larger educational community to provide a highly interactive learning environment"). Collaboration among faculty members was advocated based on the philosophy of the Progressive Education Movement.

## **Participants**

This research involved 3 key participants: Jane, the drama specialist; Sara, the kindergarten teacher; and Nicole, the first grade teacher (all names are pseudonyms). After selecting the Bailey school as the research setting, the researcher contacted the participants via email to explain the purpose of the research and to ask their participation. All teachers willingly accepted to participate in the research. Being a professional artist and an experienced educator, Jane had a unique combination of training. She had a B.A. in English Literature and an M.F.A in acting and had been a full-time drama teacher at Bailey for 12 years. Jane had also performed in the opera and theatre as a professional company member. She had been teaching drama to Grades 1 through 5, but she only began to teach kindergarteners in the academic year when this research was conducted.

Both Sara and Nicole were experienced early childhood teachers and had been working at Bailey School for more than 10 years. However, it was the first time for both of them to work with Jane in a formal classroom teacher-to-drama specialist relationship. Sara earned a B.A. in marketing and business and Master's of Arts Teaching degree in early childhood education. She had been a kindergarten teacher at Bailey for 11 years. Believing in the importance of drama education, Sara volunteered to work with Jane for the drama program when Jane decided to teach kindergarten children (interview with Sara). Nicole, the 1<sup>st</sup>-grade teacher, became a head teacher for the first time in the academic year of this research. Previously, she had worked as an associate teacher at Bailey for 10 years. Her background consisted of a B.A. in government and a Master's in elementary education. Before teaching at Bailey, she had taught students of various ages in non-school settings, including teaching infants and toddlers for a movement program and instructing swimming at a neighborhood YMCA.

## **Data collection**

Data collection included observation field notes, interview transcripts, and school documents. Sara's and Nicole's students taught by Jane were observed over 9 consecutive weeks. Kindergarten drama was observed once a week for 30 minutes per lesson and 45-minute 1<sup>st</sup>-grade drama class was observed once a week. In addition, regular homeroom hours (8:30 am – 2:30 pm) were observed twice a week during the same period of the drama program. Music and visual arts classes were observed once a week for 30 minutes per lesson. The total observation time was 112 hours. These observations were intended to establish an understanding of the classroom teachers' teaching styles and interactions with other arts specialists; the students' characteristics and behaviors in their regular and other arts classes; and ongoing class topics.

Along with extensive field notes, formal and informal interviews were conducted with all three research participants in a semi-structured format to gain a better understanding of each teacher's teaching styles, actions, and perspectives. The interviews were framed by topics of interest and consisted of open-ended questions (see Appendix). Specifically, four 45-minute interviews were conducted with Jane about teaching philosophy, drama knowledge, skills/techniques in her instruction, and benefits/difficulties in collaboration. Each classroom teacher was interviewed three times (beginning, middle, and end of the program) for 30 minutes each. The topics of interviews with the classroom teachers ranged from their general views of early childhood education and drama education to their perceptions of the drama program and working with Jane. Informal interviews with each teacher were carried out before or after the drama classes. Additionally, a 45-minute interview focusing on the school education philosophy, school atmosphere, and collaboration among teachers was conducted with the director and the assistant director of Bailey School. All interviews were audio-taped with the permission of participants and transcribed word for word.

Various documents were collected and reviewed in order to understand the school policy and mission, the drama program, each classroom teacher's instruction, and collaboration for the drama program. Specific documents to examine school policy and teachers' instructions included school brochures and handbook, the national, state, and district drama and arts curriculum, a curriculum map, teaching plans, evaluation forms, and letters to the parents. To examine collaboration, documents generated during the teachers' meetings and corresponding emails between the teachers, with the permission of all participants, were collected and analyzed.

### **Data analysis**

The data collection and analysis procedures were based on the "interactive model" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 12), which refers to the activity of data collection and three types of analysis processes – data deduction, data display, and conclusion. The interactive model can provide continuous, iterative processes of analysis for better qualitative validity and credibility compared with a single, linear analysis process (Huberman & Miles, 1994). While the inquiry was in progress, contact summary forms which consisted of main issues/themes, summary of information on each of the target questions, anything salient, interesting, or important, and new/remaining target questions (Stake, 2006) were filled out. These summary forms allowed the key points to be summarized and emerging themes to be recognized to guide planning for the next observation. In this process, data deduction was conducted by generating a conceptual level of coding system (Erickson, 2004), for example, engagement, repertoire, and isolation. Data display and conclusions included follow-ups with the participants emphasizing their interpretations of the data collected, the triangulation of information, and the construction of meaning from the phenomena observed. Multiple interim reports were made to identify and develop issues and audit what is known and to substantiate it with the data. Belonging to a research group at a University, the researcher presented/shared each interim paper with the group members who worked, studied or were interested in early childhood education and/or arts education and received their feedback and suggestions. These feedback and suggestions were selectively incorporated to enhance the trustworthiness of this research (Taylor & Bodgan, 1998).

### **Findings**

Working for the first time with Jane (the drama specialist) in a relationship as a classroom teacher and a drama specialist, Sara and Nicole (classroom teachers) approached the collaboration with different expectations. Each teacher's role in the drama sessions, expectation from each other, and interaction between the teachers are presented below.

#### **Passive support: Collaboration between Sara and Jane**

From warm-up through main drama activities, Sara (the kindergarten teacher) did not actively participate in any drama exercise. When Jane entered the kindergarten classroom, Sara informed the students of drama time and then observed the activities while sitting in the back of the room. She rarely intervened unless she noticed the situation or the students to be out of control. The following scenario demonstrates Sara's kindergarten children's drama session.

*"The Dancing Camel"*

Jane, sitting on a chair in the front of the classroom, reads *The Dancing Camel* to 13 kindergartners seated on the rug. Sara sits in the back of the classroom.

Jane: How did the camel feel when her friends told her she is not a good dancer and lumpy and bumpy?

Maria, sitting in front, answers, "She was sad." Bryan, frowning, answers in his husky and frustrated voice, "She didn't know what to do!"

Jane: She didn't know what to do, but she made a decision, didn't she? What did she decide?

Bryan answers "She danced all by herself." As Jane asks "Did it make her happy?" the children answer "no!"

Jane: Really? That's not the story that I heard. It may be sad, and that she decided on dancing all by herself is OK, even though you heard the story differently. Well, what I'd like to do is to put on some music and see what kinds of camel you could be if you were a dancing camel. I have some dancing camel music.

Sara: Dancing camel music! I wonder what music it is!

Jane finds that the CD player is placed at the back of the classroom, close to where Sara is sitting, and she hands a *Baroque Adagio* CD over to Sara to play.

Jane: You know what? Let's do a ballet. Everybody stands up. Let's do a dance around the room. Are you ready?

The children move their bodies to the soft, slow music, tiptoeing and turning around with their arms in a circle over their head. While the children are dancing, Jane passes around colorful scarves for them to dance with. The children jump, turn and skip, shaking and waving their scarves. After a couple of minutes, Jane starts retelling *The Dancing Camel* story while the children play and dance along. Sara still sits on the chair and stares at the children's movements. The dancing camel activity comes to an end with the children taking a big bow from the waist and Sara stops the music. (Observation of drama class for Sara's kindergartners).

Despite handing over the lead teaching role to Jane and limiting her participation, Sara supported the drama class and assisted in an understated fashion. For example, Sara prepared her students physically and psychologically for the drama activity by gathering the students on the rug and carrying out a simple activity such as reading a short story or asking riddles about 10 minutes before the drama session. This practice helped ease the transition into the drama session. She also utilized her skills in classroom guidance and student management, for example, by repeating Jane's words to correct students' behaviors and reminding them to pay attention. However, the knowledge and the content of drama were left entirely to Jane.

Occasionally, Jane asked Sara for materials for drama activities (e.g., musical instruments and cushions) or basic information about the students (e.g., the number of students in the class). At other times, Jane asked Sara for her opinion related to the activities (e.g., when a good time to read a book would be, whether or not it would be appropriate to play the drums during free choice time). During the interview, Jane stated "This style of short, simple conversations represented the collaborative process and could help Sara to be more involved in the drama instruction." From a technical perspective, this on-the-spot nature of interaction can be considered as a collaborative process. However, in a deeper sense, Jane's offering of 'either-or' choice questions about minor

aspects of teaching and Sara's choices did not lead to an exchange of the teachers' professional knowledge and skills in educating young children. Such interactions eventually limited Sara's contribution to the drama instruction.

### **Unreciprocated engagement**

Jane and Sara shared the same vision of using literacy in drama. During their first meeting, Sara reported that she shared her students' interests including the alphabet and words, which she preferred to have reflected in Jane's drama activities. Jane frequently attempted to connect literacy with drama activity, for example, by including various children's books and practicing body postures and movements with the alphabet. In fact, regardless of Sara's request, Jane considered literacy as an essential element of drama and therefore naturally integrated it into the center of her curriculum. Thus, Jane tried to follow the direction that Sara sought while satisfying her own goals in teaching drama. However, specific types of activity and the details of the activities were never discussed but decided solely by Jane. Such discussions are critical elements that can help to highlight the complementarity of expertise that each teacher brings, which in turn can help to develop new and improved approaches to teaching.

According to an interview with Sara, Sara appreciated Jane's effective teaching techniques and developmentally appropriate drama activities as they did not conflict with her general teaching beliefs – developmentally appropriate and child-centered education. From a classroom teacher's perspective, Sara considered understanding students' developmental stages and teaching techniques/skills to be as critical as the specific knowledge of the subject being taught. Considering that Sara, on her own, taught drama activities to her students prior to and during the drama program, she could have requested other aspects of drama that Jane specialized in. Such requests could have facilitated improvement in Sara's drama teaching and could have contributed to her professional development. Acknowledgement of what each one can bring and detailed discussions of how the distinct and complementary expertise of each teacher can work together are prerequisites to promoting the effectiveness of collaboration.

Jane articulated specific expectations from Sara and some of her concerns during the collaborative process. In an interview, Jane remarked:

I want Sara to bring the threads, what's going on in the classroom into what's happening in my room. I asked Sara for a meeting after the class but she said, "*Well, it seems to be going all right. You can do whatever you want!*" Sara is an expert kindergarten teacher, more than what I can do. Since there's no guideline about how we work together at school, each teacher works differently with others, which is fine but sometimes I feel like teachers need to know we're working together, not I'm the only person to teach.

Jane believed that the classroom teacher's information about ongoing classroom activities and students' characteristics and interests could help drama activities to be better integrated with homeroom projects. She also wanted to make full use of Sara's expertise in early childhood education to make up for her own lack of experience in teaching kindergartners. However, in practice, regular in-depth discussions never took place except for the one meeting at the very beginning of the program. When Jane requested a meeting to get feedback and to discuss possible activities, Sara did not feel such a meeting to be necessary because she believed that "Jane did a good job in teaching kindergartners" (Interview with Sara) and did not give much feedback.

Jane pointed out the pros and the cons of absence of guidelines for collaboration. According to Bailey's director, the school mandated classroom teachers to work with arts (music, drama, and



visual art) specialists in rotation but did not provide any specific guidelines/regulations for collaboration, leaving full autonomy to teachers. Within such a context, teachers can create various ways of collaboration without any restrictions. However, formal documented regulations and guidelines about teachers' collaboration at a school level can help teachers who are inexperienced in collaboration and/or who do not clearly understand how they need to be involved in the collaboration process.

### **Dynamic relationships: Collaboration between Nicole and Jane**

While Sara's roles and positions remained constant throughout the drama program, Nicole's roles and positions in the drama program changed as the sessions proceeded. In the beginning, Nicole (the first grade teacher) played a supporting role by focusing on student and class management, for example, by taking the students to the bathroom or rearranging the furniture for safety. She also assisted drama instruction by participating in all drama exercises with her students, correcting their postures during yoga exercises, and commenting on their movements/acting. She used her knowledge of individual characteristics of and relationships among her students to help instruct them, for example, by pairing them up according to familiarity or characteristics of the activity.

By the midpoint of the program Nicole was becoming more involved in the actual drama instructions. For example, she reviewed academic concepts (e.g., fairy tales) that her students had learned in her classroom before Jane introduced new yet related concepts (e.g., fables) in the drama class, and then compared/contrasted between the new concepts and the ones they had learned. Nicole's role contributed to making a connection between classroom topics and drama lessons. However, these cooperative efforts were never discussed nor agreed upon by the two teachers. Accordingly, the organization, the details, and the boundaries of their assigned roles that can ensure a fruitful rather than disruptive collaboration were not clearly defined.

Toward the end of the drama program, Nicole's involvement in drama instructions expanded. The following scenario illustrates Nicole's expanded involvement in drama instruction.

#### *"The Lion and the Mouse"*

The 1st-graders come down to the drama room with Nicole right after their art class. Jane greets them at the door and asks them to sit on the rug. Twenty-two children settle down with a little transitional noise.

Jane: Good morning, boys and girls. Well, last time Ms. Nicole was not here. What did we do last time when we were here? Does anybody remember what we did last time?

Children answer "We did warm-up" and "We acted out the play."

Jane: Yes, we pretended to be a lion and a mouse, a hunter, working all together. You worked so well together. But we didn't finish it. So we are going to do that today. Last time we talked about how a lion is different from people. How is a lion different from people?

A boy answers that they have sharp teeth. Nicole walks from back of the room to stands next to Jane. The children's eyes turn to Nicole. She speaks in her usual soft, firm voice, "Everyone, think about a lion right now and show me what a lion looks like. Show me how a lion purrs." The children make lion claws accompanied by a low vibrating sound from their throats. Some of them squat down on the floor. Nicole asks "Big or little?"

Sophie answers “Big.” Saying “They are really big, aren’t they?” Nicole shows her “sharp claws” to the children. “They really have sharp claws, don’t they? Show me how you scratch as a lion does.” Standing next to Nicole, Jane says “Just pretend!” in her usual loud voice. The children scratch their arms and their body with their fingers. Some scratch their hair with their two hands.

Jane: Oh my goodness! There seems to be a whole room of lions!

Nicole sees Elvis pretending to scratch Jack, and she says ‘no’ in a very firm voice. Elvis stops immediately. Nicole continues in her soft, calm voice, “Here people, go a little bit wild. We need a self-space. Show me sensibly what lions look like when curling their hair?” The children twist their hair with their fingers. Stretching out her mouth widely and showing her full teeth, Nicole asks “How’re their teeth? Tiny like this?” The children answer no and show their full teeth and roar.

Nicole: Giant teeth. A lion’s teeth!

Jane: Use your imagination! (Observation of drama class for Nicole’s 1st-graders)

During the drama session, Nicole intentionally repeated the same drama activity to her students that Jane had taught before. Maintaining her normal style of teaching and her usual soft but firm voice, Nicole asked close-ended questions and gave more detailed and structured guidelines for the movements than what Jane had provided. What affected Nicole’s expanded position in the drama program could be explained by her altering perceptions toward Jane and collaboration as explored below.

### **Challenges for collaboration: Different teaching styles, time and scheduling, territorial concerns, and lack of support**

During an interview conducted in the first week of the drama program, Nicole reported that her observation of Jane’s teaching for 10 years made her trust and respect Jane and allowed Jane to take the initiatives of all activities during drama sessions. However, the interview conducted at the fourth week of the drama program presented Nicole’s changed feelings about Jane’s teaching. During the interview Nicole stated:

Some kids are not interested in doing the same exercise and singing the same warm-up song every week. I think if we have different options that would hold their interest more. I talked to Jane about a strategy, using quiet voices, and that we’re reinforcing positive behaviors. But what she said was “*Someone is not listening*,” “*Someone is not sitting the way they are supposed to.*” Those are just different styles, which have not changed. If I meet a teacher who has a different teaching style, I go to all those classes. Some teachers think of specials as a planning time, so I don’t have any planning time. Collaboration with other teachers is challenging. First of all, I have a tight schedule all day long and it’s hard to find time to talk with other teachers in length. I’m meeting parents after class and attending a curriculum meeting with primary grade teachers. Not only that, my previous experience taught me we can’t change other’s teaching styles. So I’m supposed to work with Jane again according to the schedule but I can pass. You would say we are too busy. I don’t want to do that but sometimes that happens.

A primary difficulty Nicole found in working with Jane was attributed to their different teaching practices. Nicole believed certain aspects of how Jane taught, including repeated activities, use of loud voice, and negative reinforcement, were inappropriate to her students. Although Nicole

thought she had sent Jane clear messages verbally and through email about the students' characteristics and the strategies that she thought would be useful, she didn't see these strategies being implemented. Nicole did not attempt to communicate further because she believed that teaching style is hard to change. Therefore Nicole attempted to incorporate her desired teaching strategies by repeating drama activities in her own way despite her beliefs that repetition is not beneficial to her students.

When Nicole experienced disagreement with collaborating colleagues she was not willing to confront them or actively try to find solutions because she believed that an individual's teaching style was difficult to change. According to Nicole, her staying in drama class was to monitor Jane's teaching and to protect the students from what she considered to be an ineffective teaching style. Nicole's protectiveness may have prevented her from trying to connect drama with classroom activities and to engage in reciprocal relationships with Jane. Instead, Nicole chose to avoid the problems by not working with teachers whom she perceived to have incompatible teaching styles. Time and scheduling were also challenges in collaboration for Nicole. Collaboration was not always a voluntary and an agreeable endeavor but rather a job requirement for Nicole.

Contrary to Nicole's statement, Jane carried out a new story or drama activities in each session based on the observations data. However, she practiced the same yoga exercise "following Nicole's request," and used the same warm-up song because "the repeated warm-up ritual helped students to transit from classroom activities to drama experiences smoothly" (cited from interviews with Jane). Throughout the drama program, Jane silently acknowledged the shift in command and continued her supportive stance regardless of Nicole's actions. During the interview conducted on the last week of the drama program, Jane remarked about working with Nicole,

I think Nicole is very protective of her students because she became a head teacher this year. Her voice is very quiet when she teaches. I am used to filling up the big space (drama room) with my voice, but Nicole said, "*The children don't like the loud voice.*" If she thinks I should do that, I'm going to do it because I think she does that for her children. It's their room and their community, and I'm a guest.... Nicole does a nice job helping the students understand what's going on. But I feel like she doesn't understand how to teach with other teachers. I feel that I have to be patient and that you can't solve all the problems of partnership and relationship in teaching her students. Sometimes I wish I have support from the school. Teachers should recognize what they can do and meet with other teachers regularly.

Attributing Nicole's overly protective reaction to her becoming a head teacher for the first time, Jane was willing to comply with Nicole's request. Jane noticed a discrepancy in specific teaching strategies, such as the volume of their voices. Jane's loud voice stemmed from her previous professional background as a performing actress, but no effort was made to understand the differences arising from each one's different professional background. Moreover, despite Jane's willingness to follow Nicole's request, Nicole did not perceive changes in Jane's behavior in the same way Jane did.

Jane respected and silently followed the classroom teacher's different teaching styles and authority over the students without negotiating even when she noticed a discrepancy in teaching strategies. Jane was willing to follow Nicole's request partly because she saw herself as a guest in an early childhood classroom, which could critically affect her having ownership of her teaching. Thus, Jane's lack of ownership in her teaching by considering herself as a guest led to difficulties in collaboration. Jane was well aware of challenges facing teachers who engage in collaborations. She believed it would take time to understand each other's teaching style and philosophy as well as the subject matter itself. Jane identified a need for school-level support and actions in order to help individual teacher understand and actively engage in practice of collaboration.

As Jane pointed out, the Bailey school did not offer any concrete school support or supervision to promote positive collaboration among teachers. No official guidelines or regulations regarding collaboration existed. The assistant director sometimes stopped by the class and stayed for a few minutes. During his stay, neither was a formal observation carried out nor written feedback provided. When asked about teachers' difficulties in collaboration and school support for those teachers during an interview, the assistant director answered that as far as he knew there was no difficulty in collaboration. He added that if such problems existed he would meet those teachers and solve the problems. It indicated that the school personnel did not recognize the struggles that teachers might face during collaboration.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Collaboration includes mutuality and a sense of reciprocity and community among participants (Rankin, 1997; Wenger, 1998). However, there was neither a strong connection between classroom and drama activities nor meaningful exchanges of the teachers' expertise and specialized knowledge during the drama sessions studied. Findings show that working together even with same goals does not always guarantee the creation of successful experiences and synergistic impact on teachers' professional development. Rather, occasional tension and conflicts can arise between the teachers. This section discusses the causes of conflicts/difficulties in collaborations between the teachers. Focus is given at two levels, (1) the individual teacher level and (2) the institutional/school level. Conflicts and difficulties at the individual teacher level include unclearly defined leadership, lack of communication, and the teachers' perceptions of insiders versus outsiders. Institutional level concerns include absence of documented official regulations and structured school support for collaborations.

### **Difficulties at the individual teacher level**

Working collaboratively is inherently replete with tensions that often arise from the expectation to satisfy the conflicting need of the group as a whole and its individual members (Achinestein, 2002; Hackman, 2002; Smith & Berg, 1987). In this research an unclearly defined leadership issue between the teachers caused difficulties in collaboration. Leadership is defined as "the distribution of decision-making rights and obligations in a group" (Nixon, 1979, p. 160). Significant issues of leadership or power have been frequently observed in early childhood practices (McNairy, 1988) and in collaborations between specialists and classroom teachers (Faucette, McKenzie, & Sallis, 1992; Zorfass & Remz, 1992). Differential status in the early childhood classroom is determined by social characteristics including educational background and work experience (McNairy, 1988).

In the cases examined here, responsibilities and leadership in the classroom were initially decided based on such social characteristics of the teachers. The drama specialist was in charge of teaching drama and the classroom teachers were responsible for classroom/student management. However, a successful drama program for young children requires expertise in early childhood to guide and enhance drama instructions. Passive role on Sara's part did not allow sharing of each teacher's expertise, which is necessary for successful drama collaboration. Even when asked for her input and feedback on the drama class, Sara did not recognize her responsibility to provide early childhood expertise because of her assumption that drama sessions should be led solely by Jane. Practice exists because people are engaged in actions whose meanings they negotiate with one another (Wenger, 1998). No single member is fully representative of the practice as a whole and isolated representatives cannot fully act and function as they do when engaged in actual practice.

Members need to have a detailed and complex understanding of their work and develop a shared repertoire. On the contrary, Nicole's considerable leadership both in her own specialty of early childhood education and in the field of drama caused the specialist to feel like an outsider, hindering Jane in exercising what she believed to be the best drama practices. Thus, overly dominant participation can also impede sharing of expertise. Defining shared goals and responsibilities is therefore essential in allowing synergistic exchange of expertise that lead to a successful collaboration.

Next, the lack of communication especially about each one's responsibility made it difficult for the teachers to decide on how much one needs to be in charge of and in which areas. There was an absence of structured planning time. Time constraints at the individual teacher level could have contributed to the communication breakdown (Freeman, 1992; Nowacek, 1992). More importantly, insufficient and unclear ideas about the necessity of meetings and topics of discussion led to the teachers' lack of communication. The importance of communication in collaboration has frequently been emphasized and often been regarded as common sense (Faucette et al., 1992; Freeman, 1992) but in practice, it has been easily overlooked as exemplified by collaborations examined here. Common vision on learning literacy through drama that Jane and Sara shared was never clearly communicated and therefore did not result in synergistic efforts that enhance collaboration. Even when conflicts and counteracting ideas arose between Jane and Nicole, communication to ameliorate the situation was not initiated because Nicole considered communication unhelpful, saying "One's teaching style is hard to change no matter what others say." Meetings, conversations, and visits, which are called "boundary encounters," (Wenger, 1998, p. 112) are essential to provide connections between different areas, to form close relationships, and to develop idiosyncratic ways of engaging with one another. The more fundamental aspects that constitute collaboration such as sharing each one's philosophies or setting up shared goals for the program need to be articulated before working together in order to have a detailed and complex understanding of their enterprise. Otherwise, the lack of communication can hinder collaborative teaching as exemplified here by neglected contribution of one's own expertise and overly dominant leadership role preventing collaborator's input. Such results, in turn, deprive teachers of professional development opportunities.

Last, the teachers perceived themselves as insiders or outsiders. The subject of drama was categorized as "special" along with other arts and non-academic subjects such as music, visual art, PE, and library at the Bailey school. Analogous to the "special" subject, Jane's title at the school was "drama specialist" instead of "drama teacher," emphasizing her drama expertise but possibly underestimating her teaching qualifications. Moreover, the distinct title reflects the division between specialists and classroom teachers. The drama specialist can be defined as an insider to the field of drama due to her specialized knowledge and professional experiences. However, considering herself as an outsider to the early childhood territory, Jane felt isolated. She respected and followed the classroom teacher's teaching styles and authority over the students without negotiating even when she noticed a discrepancy between her and the classroom teacher's teaching strategies. As an insider of early childhood education, Nicole felt that she knew her students better and therefore took over the class when she perceived the specialist's teaching style to be conflicting with her own. However, according to Wenger (1998), a community of practice is not a simple aggregate of people defined by certain characteristics, but it needs membership through mutual engagement. Diversity including different competences, knowledge, and jobs make engagement in a community more fruitful. Thus, mutual engagement involves complementary contributions.

Friend and Cook (1992) point out that special subject teachers have concerns regarding "entering other's territory" when teaching in elementary schools. The position of the specialist in the school is usually marginalized compared to that of the classroom teachers who are responsible for

teaching academic subjects (Bresler, 2002). The contexts of specialists are quite different from those of the classroom teachers in that specialists represent a distinctive subculture within the school. Accordingly, specialists become outsiders not only in each classroom but also at the school level. Furthermore, teachers' perceptions of insider/outsider strongly influence their sense and possession of leadership in teaching as discussed earlier.

### **Concerns at the institutional/school level**

The Bailey school officially advocates individual teachers' collaboration according to the school Web site and the interviews with the director and the assistant director of the school. However, the school did not provide a well-defined infrastructure for fostering collaboration and shared norms. Specifically, any explicit or documented regulations or expectations regarding collaboration and its process as well as incentives for teachers did not exist. No formalized evaluation or observation was conducted to evaluate collaboration. Absence of documented regulation can make what teachers are supposed to do during collaborations unclear. Everything was left to individual teachers to decide about their collaboration. As revealed through an interview with the first grade teacher, she would pass on working with the drama teacher in the following semester although collaboration was mandatory at school. She did not realize the necessity of explaining her real situation and discussing her difficulties with the school personnel to improve her collaboration. Noticing other teachers' attitudes toward meetings as unnecessary and feeling like a guest in the classrooms, the drama specialist could have benefited from a school-wide, structured support.

Most schools develop norms of privacy, autonomy and non-interference, but these norms could weaken teachers' efforts to become involved in influencing colleagues' work (Levine & Marcus, 2010). As shown in this research, teachers, especially those who worked together for the first time, need support and supervision from the school. The Bailey school personnel did not recognize the hardships or struggles that teachers might have in the collaborative process. Collegial and supportive school atmosphere has been stressed as an essence of successful collaboration (e.g., Achinstein, 2002; McCammon & Betts, 1995). School personnel need to organize in ways that promote interactive learning among teachers. For example, presentations about essentials of collaboration and specific skills can reinforce teachers to understand requisites for collaboration. Workshops providing lessons in the art form can facilitate classroom teachers' learning of specific knowledge and techniques of specialized fields. Then, classroom teachers can not only support a specialist's instruction but also be able to eventually incorporate drama into their own teaching repertoire (Yaffe, 1989).

School personnel need to organize in ways that promote interactive learning among teachers. As seen in Reggio Emilia pre-primary schools, which are famous for their well-established and successful collaboration among teachers, regular official meeting hours can be set up to facilitate communication between teachers (Rabitti, 1991). A mandate to ensure the crucial time needed seems essential. Also when teachers start working together for the first time, either through teacher mentoring or peer coaching, a neutral outside person can observe their collaborative process in and out of the classroom and give feedback to these teachers. Teacher mentoring involves a hierarchical relationship between senior teachers and junior teachers, whereas peer coaching involves a mutual consultation between teachers of equal status (Murray, Ma, & Mazur, 2009). Thus, when teachers do not feel the necessity of communication even when conflicts arise as shown in this research, the third party can facilitate sharing of feelings and communication. Once articulated, problems can be addressed, and collaborating teachers can become more effective in their actions with each other and thus in the classroom.

### **Toward successful collaboration**

In conclusion, in order to make the collaboration process and the product positive and successful, efforts and improvements at the individual teacher level are critical. First of all, it is important to develop a motivational framework that is internal rather than external. Participating teachers fundamentally need to pursue goals as outcomes of their personal values and aspirations, going beyond merely following a job requirement. Collaboration requires understanding of each team member's roles and styles as well as the importance of relationship building. It is critical for the teachers to understand the complexity of the processes and the interactions involved. Then classroom teachers and specialists need to explore, present, exchange, challenge, and learn about their complementary expertise. Such an exchange can be an important part of professional development. As discussed earlier, not all teachers seem to have clear ideas about what and how to communicate with their collaborators. Especially for teachers who work together for the first time, like the participants observed here, setting up a shared goal and explicitly discussing each person's responsibilities and expectations of each other can help to clarify their roles and accomplish the goal without confusion. Conversations about shared goals and means to achieve those goals should be ongoing.

At a broader level, creation of positive school culture is critical to help all teachers at school feel ownership and belonging. One of the reasons for minimal interactions between teachers observed here can be attributed to unclear perceptions of ownership and leadership. The perception as an outsider is not only at the individual teacher level but also at the school-wide level, where academic subjects are more highly valued and prioritized than arts subjects (Bresler, 2002). Cultivation of community feeling can alleviate classroom teachers' possessiveness by recognizing that students belong not only to the individual homeroom teacher but also to all staff members to educate in a better way. Thus, the school-within-school collaboration spirit, which involves teachers from all disciplines to be responsible for the instruction of the same body of students over an extended period of time, should be promoted.

### **Appendix. Interview protocol**

1. What do you think about collaboration with Ms. xx?
2. What do you expect Ms. Xx would do in a drama session?
3. How do you define your role in a drama session?
4. What is your own interest in working with other teachers?
5. What do you think are the advantages of working with other teachers?
6. What do you consider to be difficult in working with other teachers?
7. What do you think could promote a more successful collaborative process?
8. Any other comments?

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