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Teachers' Perceptions of the Influence of Teacher Collaboration on Teacher Morale

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Alison Goldstein

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Abstract

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MALS, SUNY Plattsburgh, 1986

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Currently in secondary education, there is an impetus to have educators collaborate;

however, teaching has often been perceived as a solitary occupation, and often logistics

prevent collaboration from occurring. Furthermore, the stress of the job, teaching of

different disciplines, and low morale can often prevent teachers from collaboration. The

research problem addressed in this study reflects the challenges that teachers have with

engaging in collaboration. The purpose of the qualitative case study was to understand

how teachers are affected by collaboration, the barriers that prevent collaboration, and the

possible benefits of collaboration. This case study is grounded in the constructivist

theory, which holds that people learn from sharing in social settings. A qualitative case

study design focused upon interviews with 18 educators, observations of collaborative

sessions, and document analysis. Textual analysis of the interviews and documents

through a taxonomic system of coding helped to generate themes about collaboration.

Furthermore, these interview data were triangulated with observations and collaborative

documents and showed consistent themes. This resulted in an aggregate of five themes

including consistent definitions of collaboration and morale, an understanding that

collaboration has positively affected the morale of these teachers in terms of more

planning time, and a more collegial atmosphere; however, barriers such as time , which

was still perceived as preventing the collaborative process. Implications for positive

social change include a higher morale throughout the school that will foster a greater

sense of community and environment more conducive to learning as teachers are better

able to dedicate themselves to their profession, colleagues, and students.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my husband, Eric, and our children, Dara and

Brad. Their support and love throughout this journey has been indescribable. You have

allowed me the time and freedom to pursue my dream. Thank you for understanding

when I have had to miss your soccer and baseball games. I would also like to dedicate

this study to my late parents, LeGrand and Marjorie Thomas. They taught me the

importance of family support and love, the value of an education, and that a little hard

work reaps many rewards. Without the lessons they taught me, I would never have

attempted this journey.

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Section 1: Introduction to the Study

Teachers often work in isolation in their classrooms with little collaboration or sharing of ideas or strategies with other teachers or administrators. They keep to themselves and are shielded in privacy in their classrooms (DuFour, 2011). When walking down the hallway of a school, teachers and administrators will find it commonplace to see teachers working alone in their classrooms grading papers, creating lesson plans, and setting up activities or science laboratory projects. They are not communicating, collaborating, or sharing their expertise with their colleagues.

Teachers often say that they feel isolated when they are grading papers, planning, and working in their classrooms. The structure of the school, however, allows this sentiment to permeate its walls to an environment of limited or no collegiality (Fallon & Barnett, 2009). Schools are now trying to embed and instill a collaborative environment amongst the faculty and administration.

Experienced teachers will complain that they are burned out. Meanwhile, new teachers are vulnerable and enter their own classroom with limited guidance. These teachers are struggling with demands of principals, school districts, and legislators (Crafton & Kaiser, 2011). They succumb to a feeling of being ineffective in the classroom, as they work in isolation with very little being done to revive their passion. The new teachers will become a statistic in that a third of new teachers leave the profession after 3 years and half leave after 5 years. Teachers leave the classroom because of the expectations placed upon them, the feeling of being isolated, and the feeling of being unsupported (National Education Association [NEA], 2007). These

teachers are experiencing low morale or dissatisfaction with their jobs. Furthermore, the large turnover of teachers places a strain on remaining teachers by having to mentor and assist new teachers in becoming comfortable with their new environment. Consequently, the school culture and environment tends to decline when the teachers are dissatisfied and showing low morale.

Teachers often feel overwhelmed with all the requirements placed upon them during the work day (Black, 2003). Working as a teacher includes being a front line social worker, club sponsor, mentor, and coach. There are also the demands of meeting Annual Yearly Progress and other high stakes testing throughout the year, which has become a part of the evaluation system for teachers. This dissatisfaction with the working conditions causes teachers to leave the profession at an alarming rate.

Collaboration and professional learning communities are becoming popular in the schools of today as a way to improve student achievement along with retaining teachers and may be defined as "a systematic process in which educators work together interdependently to analyze and to impact their professional practice in order to achieve better results for their students, their team, and their school" (DuFour et al., 2010, p. 98). During a collaborative session, teachers meet in a collegial atmosphere to share their expertise and diversity for a common purpose of helping each other and the students (Conzemius & O'Neill, 2002). Pomson (2005) posited that there is gap between the concept of collaboration and its realization in the schools. Teachers in this study stated that they did not have the background to work in collaborative sessions and resisted working in groups that were chosen by their supervisors.

Bivona (2002) asserted that "teaching is one of the most challenging and demanding professions" (p. 3) because teachers have to deal with many items during their daily routine that it is not a routine at all. Lumsden (1998) stated that the demands placed on teachers are growing at an unprecedented rate and that teachers work in an environment saturated with students' emotions and reactions to the requirements of high stakes testing. High stakes testing can be detrimental to a teacher's attitude and to the student who is being taught to the test (Fisanick, 2008). There are also districts that require teachers to use the same textbooks and pace the material the same (Esquith, 2007). These teachers are expected to follow a script which eliminates their creativity and the ability to challenge students. Moreover, students are expected to be motivated to perform to the best of their ability, and teachers are expected to serve in ways like coaches and to aid at risk students under an organizational model that does not allow that type of assistance. Students also do not show the skills necessary to thrive in the world of high education (Barts, 2012). These skills include critical thinking skills, creativity, and focus. However, the question of who is responsible for motivating teachers remains.

Fifty percent of new teachers will leave the profession by the end of the fifth year of teaching (Fulton, Yoon, & Lee, 2005). The majority, over half, of these teachers leave because of job dissatisfaction and low morale. As a result, the students are ultimately the ones who lose in their motivation and academic progress with the lack of consistency among the teaching staff and being placed in classrooms with inexperienced teachers (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001). These researchers proposed that students benefit from seeing teachers model learning communities and learning from each other.

Fulton et al. (2005) also suggested that teachers need to be incorporated into a collaborative group from the beginning of their careers and that relationships with colleagues need to be a key factor. Collaboration is a way for teachers to share their knowledge and experiences to assist each other and to learn from each other in order to perform their jobs to the best of their abilities. It is also a forum where they can talk in a collegial atmosphere of trust and respect that will alleviate some of the stress (Conzemius & O'Neill, 2002; DuFour et al., 2006b; Jones-Smith, 2011). In essence, teachers need to be open to the process of collaboration from the start of their careers and have it become a natural and normal part of the teaching process.

Problem Statement

Teachers leave the profession at an alarming rate due to several reasons that cause job dissatisfaction and low morale (McCreight, 2000). As stated earlier, a third of new teachers leave the profession after 3 years and half of the new teachers leave after 5 years because of a feeling of low morale (Fulton et al., 2005). Low morale is caused by feeling overwhelmed with all the requirements placed on teachers throughout their workday and working in isolation. Teacher morale is behind everything that happens in a school including the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of the staff and students (Williams, 2006). If the atmosphere and culture of the school are negative, then what happens in the school is negative. On the other hand, when the atmosphere of the building is positive, then there will be positive results in the school community: "Attitudes have the ability to lift up or tear down a team" (Maxwell, 2003, p. 5). Negative colleagues can change the feeling of a work environment and make it an uncomfortable place to work. However, collaboration

allows educators to slowly shift their beliefs and attitudes in a positive direction that eventually transcends into the culture of the school (DuFour et al., 2010).

The area of the Southeast state where this study took place showed a retention rate of 58.7% after 10 years in the profession. Statistics have shown that 41.3% of teachers left the profession within the first 10 years of teaching (Scafidi, 2010). This is a huge turnover rate for the profession and this particular area of the Southeast. When morale and job satisfaction are at a higher level, the retention rate of teachers should be much lower. Collaboration could be a contributing factor to higher morale and job satisfaction.

Nature of the Study

In this qualitative case study, I used data from teacher interviews, observations of collaborative sessions, and collaborative documents to gather information on teachers' perceptions of how participating in collaborative sessions influences their level of morale. Participants were 18 teachers at a public high school in a metro area in the Southeast United States. This school required some collaboration among subject teachers, such as Biology, Algebra I, and World History, but not among departments.

The need for further research on collaboration and its effect on teacher morale was supported by the literature review. DuFour (2006a) stated that collaboration is an effective strategy for teachers to share their expertise on the curriculum, teaching methods, and activities promote student learning. However, DeFour (2006a) did not state if this has any effect on teacher morale. The following questions were answered in this study to reinforce the current literature:

1. How does collaboration influence teachers?

2. What benefits and/or barriers do teachers see to the process of collaboration?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine if teacher collaboration improved teacher morale in a public high school. I used an interview to collect data on teachers' perceptions of how participating in collaborative sessions influences their level of morale. Data were attained from observations of collaborative sessions as well as a review of collaborative logs that each group was required to complete for administration.

Conceptual Framework

Constructivist theory states that the learner builds on prior knowledge in a social context (Dewey, 1967). The constructivist theory was used as part of the study as a framework. Participation in collaborative sessions allowed teachers to build on their prior knowledge in a social context, allowing them to develop as educators. Knowledge is developed and built from personal values, beliefs, and experiences: Lambert et al. (2002) believed that "the development of personal schema and the ability to reflect upon one's experiences are key theoretical principles" (p. 14). Hence, collaborative sessions are social and reflective in nature and coincide with the principles of constructivism. Teachers share experiences, are able to express their beliefs and feelings in a collegial atmosphere, and learn from each other. Teachers can grow as educators and professionals and bring that optimism into the classroom, thereby creating a more positive atmosphere.

Gregory and Kuzmich (2007) stated that there are four principles that guide how learners create and assimilate new information and meaning from their experiences: (a) They are experiential and need to connect new ideas to what they already know; (b) they

are self-directed and need to have choices and the ability to prioritize their work; (c)

learners need the information that they are constructing to be applicable to their lives, and

(d) learners are performance-centered and need learning to be engaging and allow for

reflection. These principles are very similar to the ideas set forth in the constructivist

theory by Dewey (1967).

Definition of Terms

The following are key terms and their meanings as they related to this study:

Collaboration: Working together to achieve common goals with the purpose of all

participants learning (DuFour, 2010).

Collegial: "The extent to which teachers and principals share common work values,

engage in specific conversation about their work, and help each other engage in the work

of the school" (Sergiovanni, 2005, p. 12).

Morale: The feeling a worker has about the job, based on how the worker perceives

the worker's place in the organization, and the extent to which the organization is viewed

as meeting the worker's own needs and expectations (DuFour, 2011).

Professional Learning Community: A group of people working interdependently

toward the same goal (DuFour, 2010).

Assumptions, Scope, Delimitations, and Limitations

Initially, I confined this study to interviewing the teachers at a public high school

in the Southeast United States due to my accessibility. I could not control the level and

amount of collaboration that various teachers participated in. There were some teachers

who were the only person teaching a subject, and collaboration does not take place in

these circumstances. These teachers were also asked to participate, which allowed for a full picture of teachers' perspectives on the subject collaboration and morale

Assumptions

The first assumption is that the participants in this study represented the general population in a public high school. The participants for this study included 18 teachers from a public high school in the Southeast area of the United States. The second assumption is that the participants answered my interview questions truthfully and to the best of their ability. A third assumption is that the participants had training and experience in the area of collaboration and professional learning communities. The fourth assumption is that the participants honestly answered my interview questions posed and also accurately filled out the collaborative session documentation.

Scope

The scope of this study was to determine if teachers perceive that participation in collaborative sessions influences their morale in the workplace. The research employed qualitative interviewing to see if collaboration influenced morale along with observations and documentation. The population of this school was a diverse student population of approximately 1,700 students and 129 educators.

Limitations

The major limitation to this qualitative study is that it applies only to one high school in the Southeast United States and the data would need to be applied to a larger population. The second limitation is the participants in this study adequately represented the perceptions of the larger group. Participants were asked to review the findings,

transcripts of their interviews, themes, and narratives to ensure their accuracy. I also

corroborated the validity and reliability of the study by triangulation, rich narratives, field

notes, and a coding system.

Delimitations

This qualitative study was confined to in-depth interviews, observations, and

meeting records. These interviews and observations took place during 1 semester in 2010.

The participants were 18 educators with a range of experience and subject area expertise.

Administrators, students, parents, and other staff members were not included as part of

the population considered for the study.

Significance and Implications of the Study

The findings of this study are significant to the community in which it was

addressed to determine if collaboration would assist in teacher retention. The turnover in

this particular area is very high, and this creates a turbulent atmosphere in the walls of the

schools with new teachers coming in the doors each September. Over 41% of teachers in

the area of the Southeast United States where this study took place left the profession

after 10 years (Ingersoll, 2002). That is a significant number of employees leaving the

schools each year. There are problems with hiring and training new employees, along

with new employees in the classrooms. This study is significant in looking at this

retention problem along with low morale in the schools in the area to determine if

collaboration would improve morale in the schools.

The findings of this study are significant to the educational community as a

whole, as collaboration and the building of communities will create a more collegial

atmosphere in our schools. Collaboration can allow educators to address problems, programs, policies, and practices in their environment. This will help create a more conducive environment for teaching, working, and learning (Martin-Kniep, 2008). Teachers will feel better about themselves, their work, their careers, and their students, leading to an increase in their morale. Previous researchers have stated that collaboration should impact teacher morale (Martin-Kniep, 2008), but there is a lack of research showing that collaboration has an effect on teacher morale.

The findings of this study are significant because they will enable teachers to promote social change by working as a community to create a more collegial atmosphere in their schools. There has long been a tradition of teachers working in isolation behind closed classroom doors, creating a feeling of isolation with all the stress and requirements. Creating collaborative communities within the schools will allow teachers to discuss their values, beliefs, and experiences as well as their frustrations and feelings of being overwhelmed. This will allow a more collegial atmosphere to develop within the school. A collegial atmosphere and higher teacher morale will create a more positive environment for the teachers to work in and for students to learn in because working in a collegial atmosphere will create a level of higher morale among the teachers in a given school.

Implications for Social Change

Creating a collaborative community within a school will not only assist teachers in creating a more collegial atmosphere but will also create a commitment to their personal development (Du Four et al., 2006b). Collaboration allows teachers to confront

negative feelings, values, and beliefs in a direct approach and offer various positive alternatives (Grossman et al., 2001; Howe, 2007; Williams, 2006). Positive energy is strengthened and filters throughout the school, creating a positive culture for the school, educators, staff, and students.

Gregory and Kuzmich (2007) stated that there are several benefits to participating in a high quality professional learning community. These benefits include reduction of isolation, increased commitment to the school, shared responsibility for student development, collective responsibility for student success, increased understanding of content, inspired teachers, higher morale, advances in teacher strategies, and commitment to making significant changes. All these benefits result in a higher morale amongst the teachers in the school building who are working as a team to improve the school, increase student achievement, and most importantly, improve themselves.

Transition Statement

In Section 1, I discussed the basis and significance of this study. I also discussed the significance of a collaborative environment. In this qualitative study, grounded in the constructivist theory, I discussed the barriers to collaboration, the effectiveness of collaboration, and its influence on teacher morale.

In Section 2, a literature review reinforces this qualitative study by looking at previous works on collaboration in the school environment, including barriers and benefits, the constructivist learning theory, and a review of research methods. In Section 3, I describe and justify the qualitative design based on the scope of the study. In Section 4, I describe the data collection procedures and the documented findings, and emerging

themes are identified based on the data. In Section 5, I interpret the research findings and

I establish and propose implications for further study.

Section 2: Literature Review

There are four main sections contained in this literature review. In the first section, I focus on collaboration in the school environment. I highlight current literature on collaboration and professional learning communities. The second section contains information and literature relating to the benefits and barriers to collaboration in education. In the third section, I address morale and its importance in the school environment. In the fourth section, I focus on the methodology used in this qualitative study, including the theoretical framework of the study, constructivism.

The online portion of the literature review was conducted using the Walden University Library, ERIC Database, EBSCOHost database, and ProQuest Dissertations. This portion of the research provided me with further sources and authors who were also reviewed. Some of the resources were found using Google Search Engines. The key terms used for these searches were *collaboration, teacher collaboration, morale, isolationism, teacher isolationism*, and *professional learning communities*. These resources supported the framework of the guiding research questions I put forth as to how collaboration affects teachers, what the benefits and barriers to collaboration are, and how the benefits and barriers to collaboration relate to a teacher's morale. Qualitative research resources were reviewed in order to frame the methodology and design of the study. The literature review assisted in exploring the problem of isolationism at a public high school in Southeastern United States by providing insight into the guiding research questions, the benefits and barriers to collaboration, and how other teachers and researchers have felt about the effect of collaboration on their morale.

Collaboration

A collaborative community allows each teacher to build upon his or her previous knowledge and experiences while teaching other teachers in a collegial environment (Conzemius & O'Neill, 2002; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour et al., 2004; Du Four et al., 2006a; DuFour et al., 2006b; Roberts & Pruitt, 2003). In this literature review, I will focus on the history of collaboration and reform movements that brought collaboration to the foreground. Isolationism is still a problem in many schools today, and to improve school culture and student learning, collaborative procedures need to be implemented (DuFour et al., 2004; Sergiovanni, 2005). Moreover, benefits of and barriers to collaboration will be considered along with their impact on teacher morale. Benefits of collaboration range from improved morale and environment to increased student achievement and teacher performance (Crosby, 2007; DuFour et al., 2006a, DuFour et al., 2010, Leonard & Leonard, 2003). According to these same authors, barriers range from time constraints to lack of administrative support. Finally, recent research on teacher collaboration and teacher morale will be reviewed. Philips (2003), Eaker et al. (2002), and Talbert and McLaughlin (2002) stated that schools that effectively collaborate show an improvement in teacher morale.

DuFour and Eaker (1998) asserted that "American public schools were originally organized according to the concepts and principles of the factory model, the prevalent organizational model of the late 19th and early 20th centuries" (p. 19); thus, educators at the time were willing to apply the principles of this model to their schools. Additionally, DuFour and Eaker stated that "according to this philosophy, it was management's job to

identify the one best way, train workers accordingly, and then provide the supervision and monitoring needed to ensure that workers would follow the prescribed methods" (p. 20). Therefore, this is why the factory model continued for several decades into the mid-20th century. Teachers went along with this framework and worked in isolation rather than collaborating with each other. In 1983, *A Nation At Risk,* was published by the National commission on Excellence in Education. Many school reforms resulted in the late 20th century due to the findings of the report on the state of the nation's schools. According to Huffman and Jacobson (2003) and DuFour and Eaker (1998), there was little improvement in the nation's schools from the implementation of the Excellence Movement and the Restructuring Movement.

In 1998, DuFour and Eaker suggested that schools look at professional and collaborative communities. Schools would be learning organizations focusing on peer interactions, shared ideals, and school culture. DuFour and Eaker put forth a challenge to educators to promote collaborative communities in their schools.

Williams (2006) stated that humans have a natural tendency to want to work together and solve problems more efficiently and effectively (p. 13). Historically, decisions were made at the top and worked their way down the organizational ladder. Today, people want to be part of the solution, and they will support the decisions if they have been a part of the process. Teachers are trained to enter a classroom and teach to students; however, they are not trained or possess the necessary skills to work in teams. This is a barrier to the process. Hence, they need to learn skills such as listening and

paraphrasing. This process of collaboration needs to be presented to staff and faculty in a manner that is inviting and welcoming.

Teacher collaboration is coming to the forefront of educational reform, and there are several reasons for this occurrence. These reasons include side-based management, magnet programs, smaller schools, and collegiality and collaboration amongst teachers (Westheimer, 1998). The features of a collaborative team should include "interaction and participation, interdependence, shared interest and beliefs, concern for individual and minority views, and meaningful relationships" (p. 17). Initially, the teachers in the group must decide how the team will be structured along with its function and goals.

Phillippo and Stone (2006) conducted a multiyear study of school social workers in a low-performing urban school district in California. Each school was assigned a social worker who was a member of a collaborative team that monitored student academics and social behavior. These teams were multidisciplinary in their membership. Each school was able to choose how the collaborative teams were implemented and the time frame for the team. These teams focused on at-risk students and interventions for this subgroup of students. The researchers found that this particular team, its membership and structure, varied from other research the authors had read. The team respected all members' expertise and could easily create individualized plans for the students. The students, then, became the beneficiaries of this particular collaborative process.

Dearman and Alber (2005) have found that in order for there to be change in the schools, teachers must have a change in their personal beliefs. The faculty must work together in a collaborative team to hold conversations and reflect upon their teacher

practices. According to these authors, the teachers who want to see change happen in the school will find the time to collaborate. The teachers who are least likely to embrace change in their teacher practices are those who prefer to work in isolation. These authors discovered that when the faculty planned collaborative and shared the workload, learned to engage in effective conversations, studied research-based strategies, and structured conversations around examining student work, their beliefs changed. According to Dearman and Alber, more research is needed, but they found that when teachers participated in collaborative sessions, student achievement increased. Therefore, schools need to have a structure to their collaborative sessions to be beneficial.

Tillema and van der Westhuizen (2006) conducted a study of collaborative study teams. Participants were organized into three teams, and each team was given a unique problem to solve. The authors employed a questionnaire to collect data about the participants' productivity and construction of knowledge in regards to the proposed problem their group was given. Participants rated themselves between 60% and 70% in terms of productivity or how well they performed. After a reflection period, the participants expressed dissatisfaction with their performance. The participants stated that the process was inefficient, members were not interested in the process, and it was time consuming. The also expressed some benefits of the process that included the actual participation process and constructing new knowledge.

In another piece of research, Suntisukwongchote (2006) conducted a study of Fishbough's models of collaboration and the use of e-mail among high school science teachers in Perth, Australia. Fishbough's models of collaboration include consulting,

coaching, and teaming. The results of this study found that isolation still existed among the science teachers even after they participated in collaboration via the interrernet. The main barriers to their collaboration were time, equipment, and lack of administrative support. These science teachers also felt that their level of collaboration and amount of collaboration increased during the study.

Moreover, Leonard and Leonard (2003) performed a study of 56 teachers about their perceptions of collaboration in their own schools. Faculty meetings, grade-level meetings, departmental/subject meetings, beginning of the year meetings, examination preparation, sharing materials, university graduate classes, special education meetings, and peer observation were all reported as types of collaboration that were taking place in their respective schools. The majority of these teachers felt that there was only minimal collaboration being practiced in their schools, even with all the various ways teachers can collaborate. The major barrier against collaboration was time. Other barriers mentioned included a lack of commitment, lack of compensation, avoidance of additional work, preference to work alone, competition for test scores, resistance to change, and lack of interest. These participants provided suggestions to promote collaboration in the schools. The suggestions included training, professional development, providing more opportunities through common planning or providing substitute teachers, setting goals, and administrative support.

A study of novice special education teachers was conducted by Schlichte, Yssel, and Merbler (2005). These novice teachers were placed in a mentoring relationship with experienced teachers to determine if this proactive stance would decrease the attrition rate

of first year teachers. Each teacher was interviewed, and they all related that relationships with other teachers and administrators were the most important influence on their career and job satisfaction. This study concluded that a mentor or buddy teacher is essential to create an atmosphere of collegiality within the school.

Furthermore, Howe (2007) conducted a study that focused on teacher collaboration in an academy structured within a larger school. The principal chose a career academy structure to promote the benefits of a small school, sense of community, and close relationships. The participants found the small community atmosphere allowed for more targeted discussions, integrated curriculum, improved instruction, and strong relationships. Teachers had a positive attitude towards collaboration and wanted to continue this process.

Similarly, Mackenzie (2000) found that teachers who felt they worked in a collegial atmosphere had a sense of shared purpose because of their collaborative work. The teachers only collaborated about once a month on average. The majority of my interactions were of an informal format: "the study clearly shows that a sense of trust, respect, and dependence is related to shared goals. And the time spent working together is related to this mutual regard and teamwork. So attending to these would affect the climate of the school" (Mackenzie, 2000, p. 103).

Grippen (2007) conducted a study of a middle school that was recognized by the state as having a low staff morale and negative school climate. A reorganization of the school and district was one of the major factors creating a negative climate. In the midst of all the turmoil, a group of writing teachers made the decision to collaborate and create

a writing unit based on a book. Teachers participating in this project had a revitalized energy and enthusiasm for their work. They worked collaboratively during their own time without compensation to plan this unit and future units.

In 2010, The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company conducted a national survey of 1,000 teachers and 500 administrators using qualitative and quantitative methods. For the purpose of this study, collaboration was defined to mean a shared purpose, commitment to a relationship, and bringing teachers of different backgrounds to achieve a goal greater than one teacher could achieve. The major findings of this study included that two-thirds of the teachers and three-quarters of the administrators felt that collaboration has a significant impact on student success. The survey also found that most teachers collaborated by meeting in groups and sharing and assisting each other. The least frequent type of collaboration was teachers actually observing each other and reflecting on those experiences, with less than one-third participating in this type of activity. The results of this study concluded that most teachers felt their success in the classroom is connected to the other teachers. The participants in this study stated that with higher levels of collaboration, they were more satisfied with their careers as teachers at a rate of 68%.

DuFour (2011) believed that in order for collaboration to be effective, it needs to become part of the routine schedule of the school. Isolationism remains prevalent as teachers remain steadfast in the tradition. Collaboration is considered necessary and essential in many other professions such as medicine, airline pilots, and lawyers. Teachers have the majority of their workday situated in their classrooms determining how

to and attempting to reach and meet the needs of their students. DuFour also proposed

that collaboration in an already negative environment will not be successful. Instead, it

will only reinforce the negativity that already exists, and the collaborative sessions will

become venting sessions and increase the negative environment. In order for

collaboration to be successful, it needs to be supported by the administration.

Conoley and Conoley (2010) stated that "successful collaboration can result in

the construction of a social support system for teachers engaged in the highly stressful

work on instructing children" (p. 78), and for it to be successful, the focus needs to be on

the strengths that each individual can bring to the collaborative table. Each individual

brings and offers social, intellectual, and emotional support to one another to reach the

greater goal of the collaborative group.

In addition, Musanti and Pence (2010) conducted a 3-year study of in-service

teachers in English Language Learners (ELL) classrooms. The researchers felt they

would see an increase in the knowledge of ELL practices but were surprised by the

findings. Instead of collaboration, there was resistance to peer observation and sharing of

strategies and practices. The focus of the study changed to see and understand how the

collaborative sessions were being used. The field notes showed that the first year was

spent on deciding on a common goal for the group. The participants started out being

excited about working together and building positive interactions with their colleagues.

However, after the first year, there was resistance to peer observation because the

teachers felt like they were evaluating each other. Silence existed during the meetings

when they were asked to share their observation experiences. It was also determined that

the teachers ended up talking about students instead of their practices and strategies because they felt they would be criticizing each other if they talked about what they saw in a different way.

The Teachers Network performed a survey of 1210 teachers to see how collaboration plays a part in retaining teachers in high needs schools (Berry et al., 2009). This study found that teachers working in collaborative groups gained expertise in content and teaching practices. It also showed that teachers gained support from their colleagues not only in teaching practices but also in emotional support. The later was stated in connection with new and novice teachers who are the most likely to leave the profession in the first few years. The teachers discovered that to make collaboration work, there needs to be time to collaborate, such as common planning time, during the school day. Berry et al. also asserted that teachers usually collaborate horizontally and not vertically. This is a detriment to the students, especially the high needs students. Instead, there should be structure to the collaborative meetings to keep the session moving forward and not allowing a complaint session to arise. This also starts creating an atmosphere of trust and value amongst the participants.

Rasberry, Mahagan, and The Center for Teaching (2008) stated that teachers have limited time to collaborate with other teachers and that decisions come solely from above. These researchers looked at empowering teachers through professional learning communities where the content is driven by the participants. They found that for this to be successful, there must be substantial trust among colleagues. Practices for creating and building this type of trust include cultivating a supportive atmosphere, modeling open

conversations, providing time, mentoring on professional learning communities, and building virtual learning communities (p. 16). This allows teachers who are on the front line every day a say in what is effective in the classroom and school.

Pollak (2009) posits that teachers are limited today with the high stakes testing and curriculum that is designed to raise test scores and not challenging to students. This study looked at how collaboration assisted teachers in engaging students with this type of curriculum. The participants overwhelmingly preferred to work with their peers to develop ways to engage students within the scripted curriculum.

Berry, Daughtrey, Weider and The Center for Teaching (2009) conducted surveys and interviews of teachers in low performing schools to determine if collaboration would make a difference in their decisions to stay in the high needs school. The study found suggestions to making collaboration work. These suggestions included scheduling adequate time for collaboration, aligning collaboration for horizontal and vertical collaboration, structuring collaboration meetings formally, and creating an atmosphere of mutual trust. They also found that there were implications to collaboration which include the following: collaborative schools are more attractive to work in, collaboration should be organized carefully with time and scheduling, and support to succeed in the classroom. Over 80% of the teachers who participated in these collaborative sessions decided to stay at their perspective schools.

A multi-case study was conducted by Sturko and Gregson (2009) with teachers split into two different types of professional development forums. One group was delivered by a master teacher and the second group was a small teacher study group. The

master teacher led group was found to be an effective way to learn new strategies, practice these strategies and collaborate with colleagues. The teacher study group was centered around my issues the teachers were experiencing on a day to day basis. Both ways proved to be effective ways to collaborate.

A comparative case study was performed by Meirink, Imants, Meijer and Verloop (2010) to determine the association between teacher learning and collaboration. Collaboration was considered as sharing for the purposes of this study. They concluded that there was a close connection between collaboration and learning. Pedagogical beliefs and classroom practices were reflected upon and changed throughout the process. They also found that school leaders need to allow teachers autonomy in considering the topic and process so it is important to the participants.

Levine (2010) states that teachers need tools to help them reflect about teacher learning, and design and implement activities to foster their learning. The study concluded that when teachers work with each other, they are apt to try ideas and strategies that they wouldn't have otherwise tried. There are different types of communities that teachers can work in, but each allows teachers to work collegially and develop their practice.

Parnell (2010) conducted a phenomenological study on his collaborative work with teachers. Two themes emerged during his work. He found that doors need to be opened to new experiences and ideas, but one's personality needs to be reflected also. His work also demonstrated that teaching is not a solo act, there needs to be collaboration, reflection, and professional development to be successful.

Gallagher (2012) explored and observed two of California's highest performing and highest poverty schools. At these schools, the teachers embraced collaboration in the culture of accountability that is prevalent today. The majority cited the support of the administration as a major factor in this feeling. The staff at both schools felt collaboration was part of the culture of the school and was professional, not a personal association. They reviewed data, differentiation, and provided emotional support. The majority felt that collaboration was a major reason that there was a high teacher retention rate at their schools.

A grounded theory approach was utilized to determine and discuss a journey on how teacher change can be realized (Slavit et al., 2011). Middle school math teachers worked with administrators and professional developers to develop practices that all the math teachers instituted in their classrooms. They came up with six characteristics of their effective collaboration which included: creation and use of team roles, open, honest communication, support from administration, use of student learning data, using data to prepare content, and translation of their work into the classroom. This study determined that for effective collaboration, there must be time and support for teachers to collaborate. There also needs to be a change in the culture to embrace the collaborative efforts of teachers.

Myers and Rafferty (2012) report on a school that had always performed well, but once the accountability movement came into play parents and the community did not think it was performing as well as possible. Staff members were complaining about low morale and were frustrated with trying to close the achievement gap. Administration was

asked for assistance by the teachers and professional learning communities were initiated. The staff was committed to the professional learning community model and were trained to work in this format. The school district showed a remarkable turnaround with a happier staff. The teachers were involved with each other to make a difference in the school.

A low performing school in California that was slated for program improvement by the state is profiled in a paper by Smith (2012). School leaders knew they needed to find a way to implement improvement and instituted professional learning communities. They started out the new school year with training and a schedule that allowed for the communities to meet. The schools hit the usual roadblocks such as making collaboration was the focus and not paperwork. There were the team members who wanted nothing to do with the meetings. The groups created norms to eliminate what most teachers hate about meetings. Once the norms were instituted, best practices were identified and tried in the classrooms with the results shared. The union representative, who was adamantly against the communities at the start, stated she did not way to go back to the old way of isolationism.

A literature review by Riveros, Newton and Burgess (2012) looked at why collaboration has failed in the past to gain new insights. They found that the collaborative groups need to dig deeper into the nature of practices in schools, especially those that pertain to professional learning. They believe that learning communities will gain by reviewing research about how adults learn cognitively and socially.

Clary, Styslinger, and Oglan (2012) state that professional learning communities are there to motive and support student learning. They looked at a collaborative group of teachers who meet to discuss how to incorporate literacy into their curriculum and engage students in the reading of these texts. A group like the one portrayed is rare and schools continue to struggle to incorporate collaboration for their teachers. They found that the continuous development of teachers in this type of model offers numerous possibilities for growth of teachers and their students. It boosts teachers' confidence to implement strategies and literacy into the content.

A case study conducted by McMurrer and Center on Education (2012) looked at six schools who were receiving school improvement grants through the economic stimulus package to help develop change in low-performing schools. All six of these schools took steps to improve the school climate as a first step in the process. They used different strategies from school uniforms, teacher collaboration, behavior specialists, discipline policies, and parent involvement.

The administration of these schools was supportive of the process and promoted teacher collaboration as a way to improve morale. All schools saw a raise in test scores. During the first year, administrators felt improvement in school climate was the highlight.

Santagata and Guarino (2012) conducted a study of pre-service teachers and the experience they have with collaboration. They conducted this study due to the view that teaching is a profession that is conducted in isolation behind classroom doors. They found that the pre-service teachers are not equipped to collaborate in professional

development settings and need to learn this technique. They need to be given the opportunity to practice this technique before entering into their fieldwork.

<div align="center">**Benefits and Barriers to Collaboration**</div>

Benefits

Elliott (2005) states that there are many benefits to working in collaborative teams. These benefits include that the practice of collaboration is job-embedded, teachers share knowledge and expertise, teachers feel empowered to strengthen their practices, teachers can address challenging issues, student achievement is affected, teachers look for biases in their practice, and explore how all students are learning. According to Inger (1993), there are several benefits for teachers who participate in collaborative sessions. These benefits include the construction of new knowledge, preparation to assist each other, reduction of planning time, increase in a pool of shared resources, more open to change, and teachers willing to assist new teachers. Williams (2006) adds another four benefits to collaboration: buy-in, synergy, team accomplishments, and security/satisfaction.

Pugach and Johnson (1995) state that collaboration was finally being recognized for its importance in improving the educational process and achievement of teachers and students. Teachers are being asked to open their classroom doors, step into a conference room and share their wealth of information, experiences, and knowledge. These authors state that there are five reasons for teachers to collaborate which include support in demanding times, creating plans for exceptional students, implementation of new strategies, collaboration of the general education teacher and special educator to benefit

the exceptional student, and the sharing of new knowledge (p. 11). The collaborative process will ease stress and create and environment more conducive to learning. Teachers will also be more inclined to try new strategies when they have support from other teachers.

Martin-Kniep (2008) puts forth three arguments for the creation of collaborative communities. These include the benefit to students because teachers learning will be increased. There is a benefit to teachers in that they will learn from each other and share their experiences and knowledge. The third benefit is to the school itself. The school receives teachers with a positive attitude who are committed to the school. These positive teachers are more apt to sustain the necessary changes that the collaborative community has made. This author feels that professional learning communities are necessary if schools are to improve.

Troen and Boles (2010) posit that schools can expect a variety of benefits to teachers when they work together including the decline is isolationism, increase in morale, and sharing of their shared strengths. It is now being proposed that collaboration is a way to increase professional development of teachers with the offshoot of increase in student achievement.

Barriers

According to Elliott (2005), the challenges or barriers include time, administrative support, translating research into practice, developing practices, identifying negativism, and stopping patterns of non-productivity. A collegial and trusting atmosphere allows teachers to share their experiences, stories and knowledge so everyone can have the

opportunity to learn from each other. Guidelines need to be set at the start of the process so that all members know what is expected and required of them. These guidelines include that members will attend the meetings, pay attention to each other without interruption, speak and relate stories only relating to themselves, place no blame or judgment on others, be open to comments and interpretations from other members, and remember that the proceedings are confidential.

DuFour et al. (2006a) state that barriers need to be eliminated for collaboration to be successful. These barriers include they type of conversations that need to be held. These conversations need to go beyond the things that need to be taught. Teachers must stop making excuses as to why they are not collaborating. Staff members must be determined to build a collaborative environment. These authors also give ideas for creating time to collaborating which include common planning, parallel scheduling, adjusted start and end of day, shared classes, group events, banking time and in-service/faculty meeting time and in-service/faculty meeting time. Conzemius and O'Neill (2002) stated that without collaboration there will not be improvement. They continue to state that everyone needs to participate and share their skills, knowledge and experience. When teachers are taught the skills to collaborate they are more apt to have clear goals for the group. Even though it is a group working together, the members should not give up their identity and the uniqueness and diversity they each bring to the team. Each member of the team must be committed to developing skills and increasing expertise, have self-awareness, willingness to share experiences, and be willing to work as a team member.

Conzemius and O'Neill (2002) also report that there are several barriers to the collaborative process. Some of these barriers are not in the control of teachers and need to be considered when organizing collaborative teams and sessions. There barriers include the organizational structure of the school, such as departments and grade levels. Other barriers include how the school day is scheduled, the segmented school year, teachers recognized as individuals and space limitations. Other less obvious barriers include attitude, team working skills, policies that recognize my individual and lack of team structure. The most often mentioned barrier is time (Conzemius & O'Neill). This type of work is considered so time consuming because teachers regard it as something extra they need to do and not as a way to share the work and improve the results. Team members often feel that they have to accomplish a certain amount of work in a certain time frame, instead of looking at how much they can get done in the allotted time frame. It takes time to learn a new skill or technique, such as collaboration and teamwork, to the satisfaction of all team members.

According to Troen and Boles (2010) there are several common pitfalls to collaboration and common planning. These include the lack of skills needed to utilize the collaborative time effectively, being reluctant to ask for help, lack of leadership, being off task, no clear purpose, a lack of vision of effective collaboration, and building collegial interactions with lack of academic content being discussed during the sessions. This study implement the following practices: utilizing instructional talk, connecting instructional to the classroom, opportunities to implement new ideas and practices, and developing consistent practices across the collaborative team.

Morale

Maxwell (2003) states that a successful team cannot be built without the right players. He proposes 17 qualities to a good team player. These qualities include being adaptable, collaborative, committed, communicative, competent, dependable, disciplined, enlarging, enthusiastic, intentional, mission conscious, prepared, relational, self-improving, selfless, solution oriented, and tenacious (Maxwell, 2002). He continues to say that everyone has the ability to be a team player if they embrace these qualities. The team will benefit and be successful if these qualities are modeled and practiced.

Maxwell (2001) states that we are all part of a team on a daily basis. In this piece, he proposes 17 laws of teamwork. These include the laws of: significance, big picture, niche, Mount Everest, chain, catalyst, compass, bad apple, accountability, price tag, scoreboard, bench, identity, communication, edge, high morale, and dividends. These laws of teamwork are a part of a process to being a successful team that will be able to reach its goals.

Eaker et al. (2002) relate that collaboration is embedded into the school culture in a professional learning community. Administration cannot just change the structure of the school and collaboration will happen. The belief system of the school and its staff must develop to embrace collaboration and its elements. A collaborative team must have discussions about key issues such as expectations, student support, and analyzing student data. Time is mentioned at the main barrier to the collaborative process along with setting a proper perspective and priorities.

According to Hargreaves (2003), teachers cannot work in isolation in today's society. It is necessary the teachers work with each other in collegial teams to discuss curriculum, talk about reform initiatives, engage in action research, and analyze student data. In order to do this, teachers must start working with and trusting other teachers that they really do not know. Teachers try to avoid conflict, so they tend to not take part in situations where conflict could arise. They need to learn to trust and value what their colleagues bring to the meetings.

DaCosta (1995) conducted a study of ten teachers to determine if trust influenced collaboration. Interviews and observations were conducted with the participants to see if trust did influence collaboration. This study found more advantages than disadvantages to the collaborative process. These advantages included that they felt valued, support, reduction of isolation, learning about students quickly, commitment, and learning the expectations of the school. The major disadvantage was named by every participant: time. The participants felt that collaborating was another demand placed on them. All participants felt uncomfortable at the beginning of the process. At the conclusion of the study, all participants had a comfort level with the process and were pleased with their interactions. Each participant gained a feeling of trust and respect with their collaborative partners. Feeling safe was another sentiment found throughout the statements of the participants as they were able to talk openly with each other. Confidence in their own teaching abilities was strongly linked to the feeling of being safe and trusted.

In 2010, The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company conducted a survey of 1000 teachers and 500 administrators using qualitative and quantitative methods. For the

purpose of this study, collaboration was defined to mean a shared purpose, commitment

to the process of collaboration, and bringing teachers of different backgrounds to achieve

a goal greater than one teacher could achieve (p. 7).

Blazer and the Miami-Dade County Public Schools (2011) looked at the impact of

high-stakes testing. They listed many consequences including low teacher morale.

Teachers are under pressure to increase test scores each year and failure to do so causes

threats to their job security. They have a lowered feeling of professional worth. Teachers

also feel they are teaching to the test and not allowed to make professional decisions on

their instructional practices. As a result, their morale is lower than it should be.

Blodget (2009) writes that he always felt he was a professional for the past 20

years. One day, during a meeting, he heard teachers referred to as full-time equivalents

(FTE) as if they were not humans or professionals. Blodget put together what one of

these FTEs actually did as a way to show the principal and board of education what a

teacher at that school actually did. It was supposed to be a teaching model that erupted

into a way for the principal to move schedules etc. around and created a monster.   In a

school where morale was already by the way teachers were referred to, it became even

lower.

A literature review by Bousquet (2012) looks at causes of teacher burnout through

the United States. She proposes that burned out educators experience low morale and

self-esteem. It is the largest reason that teachers leave the profession. This can lead to a

feeling of low self-worth and achievement amongst teachers. There is career related

stress due to paperwork, high stakes testing, public opinion, and the many roles they are

required to fill during the school day. There is also inappropriate student behavior to deal with along with poor student achievement. Administrators can help through providing support such as praise and allowing faculty to interact socially.

Hytten (2011) states much of the same as Bousquet. The climate that teachers are in today is challenging with limited resources, poorly behaved students and public scrutiny. High grades are expected and teacher evaluations are dependent upon these grades. Collaboration is essential to overcoming some of these challenges, but it is easier to say it is necessary than to actually implement it.

Lattimer (2007) states that teachers will not fulfill their potential until they are supported by their schools and administrators. There needs to be a strong sense of community and collaboration for the development of effective teachers. This case study highlights two teachers. A veteran teacher states that she became an effective teacher when a new principal sated that the teachers needed to work together to meet the needs of the students. She felt the principal respected her knowledge and experience. The second teacher, a fairly new teacher, did everything that was expected of her and fulfilled all the mandates of the district. Administration constantly brought other teachers through her classroom. These other teachers were negative about themselves and created a negative environment. The principal did not realize the dynamics she was creating. This teacher did not feel she could speak up to administration. Finally, she had the opportunity to work on redesigning her school into professional learning communities. Both teachers felt these collaborative efforts were the turning points of their careers.

Mulholland and Wallace (2012) look at the reasons a teacher left the profession after eleven years. This teacher looks positively on her first three years of teaching. There was a decline in year four when she was assigned a higher grade level but was sharing a class. This ended up being part time. An additional assignment came later in the year with a younger group. She was not able to have the space her way as the room was share. This was the same in her fifth year. A new principal came in the sixth year and by year seven, she was a permanent teacher. She started becoming bored, was given the difficult students and a feeling of not belonging. Prior to her resignation, things were going downhill. She became tired and negative. She left school abruptly feeling like she did not have any more to give. She was not a member of the team and her morale was at an extremely low point.

Nderu-Boddington (2009) states that morale and attitude are important factors in how goals in a school are accomplished. Teachers are overworked and don't have adequate time to plan effective curriculum. They need to be able to work in teams to plan an effective curriculum and this requires administrative support.

Nolan (2011) posits that in today's educational climate, teachers face an uphill battle it is difficult to stay positive with all the challenges teaching provides. Teachers today are dealing with low morale and high anxiety. It is suggested that teachers collaborate to confront the challenges they face and pursue alternatives. This will provide hope and a higher morale for the staff, which trickles down to the students.

Sheppard, Hurley and Dibbon (2010) formulate a distributed leadership framework which can also be called collaborative leadership. In this format, formal

leaders provide resources for professional learning communities in their schools and allow collaboration to happen and share decision-making in the school. This study looked at whether this increased morale and enthusiasm among the teachers. Statistically, it had a large impact on the morale and enthusiasm of the staff.

Stanley (2011) found that teachers need to be connected to each other collaboratively to reduce stress, be effective and positively enhance interactions with their students. When educators work together and are connected, they can solve problems and create a less stressful environment. Teachers will benefit by having a higher morale in the workplace.

Conceptual Framework

Teachers' practice of collaboration is grounded in the theoretical framework of constructivism: and can be defined as the theory of learners constructing meaning based upon their previous knowledge, beliefs, and experiences—and their applications to schools" (Lambert et al., 2002, p. 1). Teachers come to a collaborative meeting, either formal or informal, with their diverse and various backgrounds and experiences to share, expand, and learn from each other. The information gathered during collaborative sessions is assimilated into the framework of their previous knowledge and backgrounds. Lambert et al. (2002) continue to say that the strengths of my individuals involved in collaborating need to be brought forth to the benefit of the entire group. Constructivist approaches allow teachers to explore their careers and methodologies in a social context (Bouchamma et al., 2012, p. 1).

"Our net result thus far is that social environment forms the mental and emotional disposition of behavior in individuals by engaging them in activities that arouse and strengthen impulses, that have certain purposes and entail certain consequences" (Dewey, 1967, p. 16): collaboration allows teachers to gather in a social context that allows them to share with each other and learn from each other. Through the processes of constructivist learning and collaboration, teachers' feelings about their work are revitalized.

Qualitative Study

A qualitative case study design was selected based on the area and environment of the study. According to Creswell (2009) a case study approach allows the researcher to identify human experiences through a small number of participants while the researcher sets aside personal experiences. The five qualitative approaches were studied and examined to determine this specific approach. The five approaches as stated by Creswell (2009) are, "ethnography, grounded theory, case studies, phenomenological research, and narrative research" (p. 13). The case study approach was chosen to study a phenomenon that the participants had experienced, in this case the process of collaboration.

The qualitative methodology was preferred as it is an approach that allows exploration of the meaning given to a problem by an individual or a group such as a collaborative group or its participants (Creswell, 2009). Utilizing this approach, the research starts with guiding questions that can be explored further. The study may take place in the participant's home setting, such as his/her classroom. The format is flexible

and supported with an "inductive study, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation" (Creswell, 2009, p. 4).

Summary

The literature and research read to this point all agree that collaboration is necessary and important process in the schools to improve student achievement, student behavior, student attitudes and teaching practices. When looking at the literature and research, there emerge some common themes such as the acquisition of new skills, improved student achievement, improved teaching practices, and lack of time.

The lack of time is mentioned frequently as the main barrier to teachers participating in a collaborative team. DuFour et al. (2006a) gave several suggestions for creating time to collaborate. These suggestions include common planning time, parallel scheduling, adjusting the start and end of the school day, share classes, schedule group activities, bank time, and the use of in-service time. Conzemius and O'Neill (2002) state that team members need to set priorities to be productive and use time efficiently. These authors continue to say that meetings should have a focused agenda, and the attendees need to be prepared. The participants in the study conducted by Leonard and Leonard (2003) did not believe that they met often enough to effectively participate in collaboration. The participants in this particular study also felt they should be compensated for the time spent in collaboration.

Improvement of teacher retention is also mentioned in some of the literature and research. Ingersoll (2002) states that as many as 39% of teachers leave during the first five years due to job dissatisfaction. Ingersoll continues to say that teacher turnover could

be reduced with better support, increased salaries, student discipline, and teacher input into decision making. Schlichte et al. (2005) identified factors that relate to teachers leaving the profession after the first year. These factors include large caseloads for special education teachers, behavior management, excessive paperwork, school organization, and lack of administrative support (p. 35). These authors, Schlichte et al., propose the use of mentor and buddy teachers to ease isolationism and stress that first year teachers often feel.

The majority of the literature and research consider collaboration as a way to alleviate the feeling of isolationism that many teachers feel. Many teachers are willing to collaborate as long as it does not enter their classroom (DuFour et al., 2006, p. 98). These teachers generally have a fear that they are ineffective and will be discovered by their peers to be ineffective. These teachers need to overcome this fear and recognize the value of the collaborative team and be willing to learn from each other.

Collaboration must be done in a collegial and trusting atmosphere to be successful. Participants need to feel that they can speak and share their stories and experiences without being judged (Elliott, 2005). Almost all the literature and research read to date points to the need for an open, trusting, and collegial atmosphere; no one provides any guidelines for creating this type of atmosphere. The atmosphere is considered one of the most important aspects of the collaborative process, and the literature is lacking in how to establish the appropriate atmosphere.

DuFour and Eaker (1998) mentioned that teachers need to be shareholders in the process and participate in the development of the mission and values of the collaborative

teams. Teachers being involved in the development process should bring some resisters on board with the process. Resistance to the process of collaboration is mentioned by several authors, but none of them really propose a method to overcome this reluctance and create valuable team members of this abstaining group of teachers.

The majority of the literature and research mentions briefly that collaboration will improve teacher attitudes. It does not mention how collaboration improves the attitudes of teachers. Teacher attitude or morale is very important in the school. According to Lumsden (1998) morale is important for student learning, student achievement, and teacher health. When teacher morale is high, the environment is more pleasant for the teacher and student. This creates an environment where students can achieve more. Low morale can lead to job dissatisfaction and a decrease in teacher health, such as high blood pressure and stress.

The next section will address the methodology used for this qualitative, case study on collaboration and morale as perceived by teachers. All of the following are discussed and explained: research design, participant selection, data collection procedures, data analysis, participants, and validity. The vital role of the researcher is also explained as it relates to a qualitative study.

Section 3: Research Method

This was a qualitative study grounded in the constructivist theory in which new knowledge is constructed and built in a social context (Dewey, 1963); here "the key to understanding qualitative research lies with the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 3). Collaboration is a social process where teachers share their knowledge and experiences with each other. The new knowledge is then assimilated into the teacher's prior knowledge to create new meaning or a better understanding.

Merriam and Associates (2002) posited that there are several characteristics to qualitative research. The first characteristic "is that researchers strive to understand the meaning people have constructed about their world and their experiences" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, pp. 4-5); this will assist in putting all the pieces of the study together. The second characteristic is that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. The researcher is able to be responsive to the data, create his or her understanding, and be able to clarify by communicating with participants. Biases must be identified and monitored to decrease their impact on the study. The final characteristic is the richly descriptive nature of qualitative research. Words of the participants are used instead of numbers to convey the data and show what the researcher has learned about the topic of the study.

Creswell (2009) defined the case study approach as a way of determining participants' feelings about phenomenon via their descriptions. The researcher studies a

small number of subjects to determine patterns of meaning while setting aside his/her own biases so the experiences of the participants are in the forefront.

In the next section, the methodology of the study will be discussed. Included in this discussion are the research question, the site, the participants, the forms of data collected, the methods of analysis, and validity. The framework for this study is the qualitative case study approach. This allows the researcher to construct meaning from the perceptions of the participants.

Design of the Study

A qualitative case study approach was preferred for this study because I am exploring the experiences of the participants in their routine setting. This approach allows the researcher to be a data collection instrument and use inductive logic to create meaning. It also allows meaning to be created as a whole and not as isolated situations or generalizations (Hatch, 2002). The researcher is an integral part of the qualitative process. The researcher is tasked constructing meaning from the collected data in its various forms. The forms in this particular study are interviews, observations, and documents. Thus, the researcher must create and construct a whole from all the parts gathered during the study period. The qualitative approach was chosen for this particular study so I could collect data in the field from many sources.

Research Questions

The two research questions investigated were as follows:

1. How does collaboration influence teachers?

2. What benefits and/or barriers do teachers see to the process of collaboration?

Teachers' perceptions of their collaborative sessions and the influence on teacher morale were revealed through interviews, observations, and collaborative logs. Content of the collaborative sessions was exposed through all three forms of data collected. Furthermore, atmosphere of the collaborative sessions was discovered through interviews and observations. Observations also revealed the dynamics of the sessions and how teachers related to each other and shared their experiences and knowledge. Finally, evidence of the teachers' perceptions between collaboration and morale was searched for throughout the process of collecting the various forms of data.

Research Context

The site chosen for this study was a public high school in the Southeast United States. The school has approximately 1,700 students of a diverse nature in heritage, economics, and personal backgrounds. The school has 129 teachers covering all the content areas including academics as well as Physical Education, Career and Technology, and Fine Arts. Ease of accessibility for me was the main reason this school was chosen. I was a teacher in the Science Department and have been on staff for 3 years. Another reason this site was chosen is that collaboration is required by the administration on the subject level at least every 2 weeks. For example, all Biology teachers will collaborate, all 9th Grade Literature teachers will collaborate, and all World History teachers will collaborate. Hatch (2002) stated that the research setting should be able provide the appropriate data to answer the research questions and be accessible, practical, and familiar to the researcher. Hence, the necessary requirements were met by using this accessible research site.

Ethical Protection of the Participants

This qualitative study complied with all ethical standards related to research with human subjects accepted by the National Institute of Health. I must be aware of many issues when conducting a study that include participant permission, privacy and confidentiality of the participants, and collecting accurate data (Yin, 2013).

All participants were provided with an informed consent form that stated participation was strictly voluntary, the purpose and procedures of the study, and that they had a right to receive a copy of the results of the study. Permission was approved by the necessary administrators at the school and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Walden University. Approval number 11-05-09-0331705 was granted. The permission was granted after review of the proposal for the study, training in the ethical treatment of participants, and an application form. The privacy of the individuals was maintained by using aliases.

Role of the Researcher

I was employed at the participating school at the time of the data collection. At the time, collaboration was required by administration of all subject area teachers. This meant that Biology teachers or Algebra I teachers would meet to discuss various issues. The objective of this study was to determine the perceptions of the teachers as to how collaboration affected their morale.

As the researcher, I was the primary data collection instrument. My role was to design a valid and reliable study by communicating, focusing on a single item or phenomenon, being flexible in the process, and noticing personal biases (Creswell, 2009).

I needed to be able to communicate with the participants and ask valid questions, listen to responses, and be insightful. This qualitative case study used guiding questions during the interviews. This allowed me to ask follow up questions as deemed necessary for clarification or to eliminate the yes and no answers.

Yin (2013) stated that during qualitative research, it is necessary for just a single phenomenon to be identified and researched. This goes along with scientific research where just one variable is measured and the influence of other variables is minimized. I developed this research to determine themes and categories from the data collected.

Flexibility is necessary during data collection and analysis as researchers are dealing with human beings (Yin, 2013). Qualitative research depends on the traits of the researcher such as intuition, sensitivity, and analytical abilities. A qualitative researcher makes interpretations based on the data they acquire during the data collection process.

It was also imperative to be aware of researcher bias as it can influence the overall process. Researchers make interpretations that cannot be separated from their experiences, background, and history (Creswell, 2012). One potential bias for this study came from my own experience with collaboration and my attitude towards its impact on my own morale. There was also the fact that I was a colleague of the participants at the time of the data collection. A journal was kept to document my feelings.

Participants

The participants were 18 volunteers from the staff of the research site. The teachers at this school received an email inviting them to participate in the study. From those who volunteered, 18 were selected and interviewed and observed. Thirteen of these

teachers were involved in collaborative sessions with their subject area colleagues. The

other five did not participate in collaboration as they were the only ones to teach a

particular course, such as Oceanography, and did not belong to a collaborative group

during the current semester but had participated in collaborative groups previously.

Creswell (2012) stated that for a case study, the participants "must be individuals who

have experienced the phenomenon being explored and can articulate their conscious

experiences" (p. 111). Thus, the participants who volunteered and were selected

participated in collaborative sessions or were familiar with the process of collaboration.

There were various levels of experience from a second year teacher to teachers with over

20 years of experience. These participants taught Math, Special Education, Science,

Social Studies, and Spanish and the high school level. Each participant signed a

permission form (Appendix A) stating that they understood the nature of the study and

the time commitment that was required of them.

      Eighteen participants were used for two main reasons: Creswell (2012) stated that

for qualitative studies, the number of participants can range from five to 20 people; the

second reason for 18 participants was that I purposely chose them. The responses to my

interview questions were becoming similar and repetitive with no new information or

data, and, therefore, I had enough data to analyze.

Methods of Data Collection

      This qualitative case study explored the collaborative experiences of the

participants where I can conduct interpretive qualitative research. In a case study,

participants interpret everyday experiences from the perspective of the meaning it has for

them (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Perceptions of the teachers on the influence of

teacher collaboration on morale were explored using qualitative methods. Therefore, the

use of qualitative methodology allowed me to obtain rich data for analysis.

Interviews, observations, and collaborative logs were used to collect data. The use

of several forms of data condensed the risk of bias, increased validity and reliability, and

reduced the limitations of using only one form of data (Howe, 2007). The data forms

provided triangulation to corroborate evidence when several sources of data were

collected (Creswell, 2012).

Interviews

Interviews allow qualitative researchers

to uncover the meaning structures that participants use to organize their

experiences and make sense of their worlds. These meaning structures are often

hidden from direct observation and taken for granted by participants, and

qualitative interview techniques offer tools for bringing these meanings to

surface. (Hatch, 2002, p. 91)

In a qualitative case study, in-depth interviews were used as a primary source of data and

lasted from 40 minutes to 1 hour in length. A list of questions was used to guide the

conversation and gather rich data that answered the research questions. There were two

lists of guiding questions: one for the collaborating teachers (Appendix B) and the other

for the noncollaborating teachers (Appendix C). The noncollaborating teachers could not

answer such questions as what a collaborative session was like since they did not

participate or how collaborating affected their morale or workload. Each interview was

tape recorded with the participants' permission. I took notes on a copy of the questions to complement the recorded conversation as well as provide an alternative in the presence of a technical difficulty. Within a short time after the interview, each interview was transcribed. A copy of the transcription was provided to the participant to review for accuracy and to see if there was any information that needed to be added or reworded for clarification.

The transcripts were coded, which included the naming and categorizing of themes and patterns that emerged as the data were analyzed (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Predetermined categories proved to be useful when starting the data analysis process. They provided a starting point that could be revised and adjusted to as new categories emerged during the analysis process.

A challenge to me was being familiar with the participants as they were all on staff at the same school. I had to step back and become a student and listener on the subject and not be an expert or pose opinions. I also needed to be careful when wording my interview questions so as not to lead the respondents to a certain answer or response. An interviewer's position can also distort the responses (Coleman & Briggs, 2002). Participants in this study were my colleagues and may have said what they felt their coworker wanted to hear instead of providing an accurate picture of the phenomenon.

Theinterviews took place in the classrooms of the participants, either during their planning period or after school. Privacy and confidentiality were preserved and respected during these times (Coleman & Briggs, 2002). Interviews held in the participants' classrooms allowed my interviewees to be comfortable and created a relaxed atmosphere.

Observations

I used observations of collaborative sessions because the use of "observational data represents a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a secondhand account obtained in an interview" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 13). I attended two collaborative sessions of each participant for a total of six sessions. Each session had a total of four to six teachers present. Administration at this high school requires that collaborative groups meet at least once every 2 weeks. I took field notes, which included the physical setting, activities, events, and reactions of the participants and researcher.

I was a passive observer during these sessions. An accurate picture of the interactions and reactions of the participants was gathered through focused observation. Being an observer only, I was allowed to be unobtrusive and not in the midst of the discussion, possibly influencing the session. As a colleague of the participants, it was difficult not to join in the conversations at these various collaborative meetings.

Field notes were taken while observing at the collaborative meetings. They were transcribed for ease in reading and analyzing at a later date and time. These notes included the physical setting, body language of the participants, and items brought to the meeting such as student work, tests, grades, worksheets, power points, and projects. Themes and patterns that emerged during these collaborative sessions were corroborated with the themes and patterns that emerged during the interviews.

Documents

Each collaborative group is required to complete a collaborative log (Appendix

D) that is collected by the department chair and school improvement committee. The log

generally contains what was discussed during the meeting such as strategy suggestions,

who will prepare the next test, upcoming projects, student expectations and behavior, and

activities for the classroom. There is also an area to document how the strategies and

activities relate to the SIP goals of the school. Major goals for this school relate to

vocabulary, reading comprehension, and problem solving. Collaborative logs provide

information, as well as corroborating the data received from the interviews and

observations.

<div align="center">

Methods of Data Analysis

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Organizing the Data

Qualitative studies provide an enormous amount of data through interviews,

documents, observations, and other qualitative methods. Organization of the material is

fundamental so that no data is lost during the time of the study. All documents,

transcripts, and memos were recorded on a excel log sheet. Interviews were transcribed in

a timely manner, as well as the coding of these transcripts. Word documents were used to

organize the data by teacher and their respective collaborative group. Decisions are

continually being made during a qualitative study, and memos in Word provided a

valuable means of recording these decisions.

A folder was created for each teacher participant in the study. Transcripts,

collaborative logs, and observation notes that pertained to that particular teacher were

organized in the respective folder. This allowed for easy retrieval of the data pertaining to

.that particular teacher as well as a way to corroborate the data for that particular teacher.

If a question were to arise during data analysis, I could easily take the folder and have all

the data accessible when getting clarification from the participant.

Coding

Coding is a process where the researcher can place information from the

transcripts into categories (Creswell, 2006). The researcher creates a list of possible

categories before starting to code the transcripts. More categories can be added as

necessary as the coding process progresses. Themes and patterns then emerged showing

their perspective, views, and beliefs about the topic of the research. Transcripts of the

participants for this study were coded as soon as possible after the interview.

Theinterview was still fresh in my mind for more accurate analysis. Coding was done

based on whether the statements related to collaboration (c), morale (m), benefits (b), and

barrier (be). There was also a breakdown of whether the statements were positive or

negative to theidea of collaboration (can or cp), and also similar to morale (mn or mp).

The collaboration logs were also coded in the same manner and linked to the interviews.

The field notes were also analyzed in the same manner.

<div align="center">

Trustworthiness and Validity

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"All researchers aspire to produce valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical

manner. And both producers and consumers of research want to be assured that the

findings of an investigation are to be believed and trusted" (Creswell, 2009, p. 22): and as

such, people want to know that they are reading and studying a piece of research that was

done in a manner that the results can be trusted, are creditable, and can be transferred to other education institutions.

Validity is how close the findings are to reality. Triangulation was used in this study to ensure validity. Triangulation uses multiple data collection methods to corroborate the information collected from each type of data (Creswell, 2012). Interviews, observations and documents were methodologies used in this study to collect data.

Member checking was also used throughout the study to ensure validity and accuracy. Creswell (2012) also notes that member checking is a valid means that can be used to ensure that the themes are reviewed by the participants in the study. The participants for this qualitative case study were allowed to review both the interview transcripts and the larger themes that I discovered. With each participant, I ensured that they were aware of these findings and accepted my interpretation of the data.

Trustworthiness in a study is essential and can be defined as "the extent to which research findings can be trusted" (Creswell, 2012, p. 27). Trustworthiness can be ensured by using triangulation, investigator's position, and the audit trail. A journal was kept by the researcher during data collection to describe how various items evolved such as coding categories and various decisions.

Summary

There has been a substantial amount of research on collaboration and its effect on student achievement, but very little research on how collaboration affects teacher's morale. Collaboration and professional learning communities have been shown in the

research to have a benefit in school improvement and reform. With all items placed on a teacher's plate in the era of No Child Left Behind, is there a benefit of keeping teacher's morale in the positive? This qualitative research examined whether teachers felt their participation and involvement in collaboration affected their morale on the job.

Eighteen teachers participated in this study from a public high school that requires collaboration by content area. Each teacher was interviewed, their collaborative sessions were observed, and the collaborative logs from these sessions were collected and analyzed. Each interview lasted about 40 minutes and the participant was asked to review the transcript for accuracy. The observations lasted about 30 minutes each with the researcher acting as a passive observer. A copy of the collaborative log was collected for each teacher who participated in the study.

This study was formulated to determine the perspective teachers have regarding the effect collaboration has on their morale. As the literature states, there are several barriers to collaborating, but also substantial benefits. Collaboration has been cited in the research as a way to improve schools. This case study was conducted to see if collaboration also helps teachers and their feelings about their work and workplace.

Section 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to determine teacher perceptions of how collaboration influenced their morale in the workplace. In this section, I show how teachers define collaboration and morale, how they feel about their collaborative efforts, and how collaboration has affected their morale in the workplace. The data were collected using the following methods: 18 interviews that had guiding questions, observations of six collaborative sessions, and six collaborative meeting logs. I coded these data to include sections on collaboration, morale, benefits, barriers, and collaboration's influence on morale.

Process of Collecting Data

In order to discover how collaboration affects teacher morale, I conducted the following procedures to collect data for this qualitative study. Permission to conduct the study was first granted by the Walden University IRB (approval 11-05-0900331705). After receiving IRB approval, the Board of Education of the school system was asked for approval to conduct the research and approval was granted. Once approval was granted from the previously named groups, an email invitation was sent to the faculty at the participating school to request their assistance as participants in the study. Once a faculty member had responded in the affirmative, a consent form (Appendix A) was placed in his or her mailbox to be reviewed and signed prior to the interview session. Interview times were then scheduled via email communication.

The purpose of this study was to determine how teachers perceive the influence of collaboration on their morale in the school. The 18 teachers were selected from a public

school in the Southeastern United States with a faculty population of approximately 129

and a student population of approximately 1,700. This research site was chosen due to its

accessibility to me who is a faculty member at the school. The results and data gave an

insight into the influence of positive collaboration by teachers on their morale in their

workplace. The main criteria for their selection were that they were involved in a

collaborative group in the school. There were 13 participants who were currently in a

collaborative group and five participants who were not in a collaborative group during

the semester of the study but had participated in collaborative sessions previously. All

participants collaborated within the general school setting or department setting, just not

in the subject area. In addition to interviews, observation of collaborative sessions and

document review were employed to gather data.

Interviews

Eighteen interviews were conducted in a face-to-face format for approximately 30

minutes each. The guiding questions (Appendices B and C) were used to facilitate these

sessions. These questions focused on their perception of collaboration, morale, and

individual teacher perception of the influence of collaboration on morale. These sessions

were recorded on a cassette recorder and transcribed with 24 hours using Microsoft

Word. There were no names used in these transcripts to maintain confidentiality. In order

to ensure reliability and validity, I allowed the participants to review the transcripts of

their interview. They were allowed ample freedom to make changes they felt were

necessary. The changes made were in expanding on their definitions or changing a word

to reflect their thoughts more clearly. This member checking procedure allows a

researcher to improve accuracy, credibility, and validity of the recorded interview (Cresswell, 2012). Member checking also allows critical analysis of the findings and content of the interviews (Creswell, 2012).

Observations of Collaborative Meetings

I attended six collaborative meetings as a passive observer. During these meetings, I took field notes in a journal and also filled out the same collaborative log (Appendix D) the participants had to complete. I spent about 30 minutes each time doing these observations. The observation notes were used to compare to the interview transcripts to determine the accuracy of what the interviewees told me was happening in the collaborative sessions. During these observations, I kept field notes to document what I saw taking place during the meetings.

Collaborative Logs

In addition to interviews and observations of collaborative meeting, I collected collaborative logs. Administration of this school required each participant complete a log of each meeting attended and turn it in to the department chair. Analysis of the logs allowed me to determine if what was being observed in the collaborative meetings was accurately documented. Along with the analysis of the collaborative logs, I conducted observations of these meetings as discussed in the previous section. Having multiple types of data allowed me to triangulate all three types of data to determine themes. Themes are described as a pattern across collected data sets as they relate to research questions (Yin, 2009).

Coding

Themes were determined by coding the interviews after they were all completed. Coding involved going through the transcripts and determining themes and discrepancies. As themes started to appear, they were categorized according to the questions asked during this study. These data were triangulated with the document analysis and observations to improve consistency and to see any discrepant findings. Triangulation allowed me to look at the data from multiple types, such as the interviews, collaborative logs, and observations used in this particular study (Creswell, 2012). Overall, the multiple forms of data collection supported the idea that collaboration has a positive effect upon morale; however, some minor discrepant data did emerge. This discrepant data will be discussed later in this section. By using multiple data sources in the form of interviews, observations, and collaborative logs, triangulation validated the data. I used triangulation to minimize any possible bias on the part of the participants and me. I was concerned that the participants may say in the interviews what they felt I wanted them to say as they were colleagues.

<center>**Teachers' Backgrounds**</center>

Eighteen teachers voluntarily participated in the study. Twelve of those teachers are general educators, and the other six are educators in the Special Needs Department. The following chart shows the educational background, by degree earned of the teachers who participated in the study. As seen in the Table 1, 12 of the 18 have graduate degrees.

Table 1

Educational Level of the Participants

Degree earned	Number of teachers
Bachelors	6
Masters	10
Education Specialist	2

Table 2 shows the years of experience of teachers who participated in the study. It is separated by their total years of experience and their years of experience at the participating school. The chart shows that these teachers have many years of experience with quite a significant amount of teaching outside the participating school.

Table 2

Participants' Years of Experience

Years	Total years of experience
0-1	0
2-5	5
6-10	3
11-15	4
16-20	0
>20	5

Overall, the average age of experience among the participants is 12 years, with an average of 4.6 years of experience at the participating school.

There was an extensive array of experience among the participants. They had taught not only in public schools but also in Christian schools, military schools, psycho-educational centers, and reform schools. This diversity of experience of the participants

created a varied and broad experiential background to draw upon for the interview

portion of the study.

Findings

In this qualitative case study, five themes emerged acrossthe interviews and data

collected that documented and described how teachers believe collaboration affects their

morale in the work environment. Table 3 shows how those themes are correlated with the

research questions proposed for this study.

Table 3

Themes

Research question	Themes
1. How does collaboration influence teachers?	1. Definition of collaboration
	2. Definition of morale
	3 Collaboration and the classroom
	4. Teachers' perception of the influence of collaboration on morale
2. What benefits and/or barriers do teachers see to the process of collaboration?	5. Benefits and barriers to collaboration

Theme 1: Definition of Collaboration

The definition of collaboration is the basis of the overall discussion that took

place during the study as determined using interview questions related to Research

Question 1. All the participants were asked to give their definition of collaboration as it

relates to teachers. This related to the following interview questions:

1. How do you define collaboration?

2. How often do you meet with the other teachers you collaborate with?

All the participating teachers stated that it was teachers working together, but then some differences appeared. Teacher B posed the definition as follows:

> The way I look at collaboration is teachers coming together to see what are the best practices and strategies and show those ideas, along with what worked and not worked in the classroom. Teachers learn from the experience of other teachers and hopefully walk out with a greater understanding of what you have been doing and gaining knowledge from the teachers you collaborate with.

Nine teachers mentioned pacing of the course, writing lesson and/or unit plans, and writing or planning common assessments when they defined collaboration. Teacher E mentioned the following:

> The most useful collaboration is teachers just getting together informally and sharing ideas. The more specific the better for all participants. Sitting around and talking about what to do in general terms is not as helpful as this is how I do this particular lab. It helps you get some ideas.

The common theme was that sharing strategies and implementation techniques are essential to effective collaboration. Teachers who participate in the collaborative process gain concrete strategies, activities, and lessons to implement in their classroom (Comenius & O'Neill, 2002, DuFour et al, 2006).

Theme 2: Definition of Morale

The second theme, definition of morale, was determined by relating to the answers provided to the following interview question:

1. How do you define morale?

Every teacher interviewed related that morale is a feeling or attitude towards one's workplace environment. Eight of these teachers stated that it could be a positive or a negative feeling. Another four teachers defined morale with only positive attributes. Teacher B defined morale as follows:

> The overall emotions or feelings that the teachers or staff has regarding a particular topic, what is taking place in the school, decision making, what input teaches have into decision making. Morale plays an essential part. When morale is low, if can affect you in many ways, in how you perform, ways it is manifested, and how it is going to be brought into the classroom.

Teacher C defined morale as follows:

> In general, I would define the word as how people feel about their work environment. If it is good morale, they feel great and appreciated. If it is bad morale, they feel lousy. It is basically about how they feel about their work.

No teacher felt the word only had negative connotations. Instead, the majority related only positive attributes to the word, such as "feeling good about teaching, taking some pride in your work, and feeling inspired." Another teacher described morale as "people's comfort and level of satisfaction with their current employment situation." This same feeling is described in DuFour and et al. (2006a), when the authors described teachers who are happy and comfortable in their place of employment and plan to stay at that educational institution.

Theme 3: Collaboration and the Classroom

The third theme, collaboration and the classroom, related to the following interview questions interview:

1. How does collaboration impact your classroom?

2. How does collaboration impact your workload?

3. Do you collaborate on individual classroom lessons?

The teachers were asked about how collaboration impacts their individual classroom and workload. Seventeen of the 18 teachers stated that collaboration had a positive influence on their classroom. Eight teachers talked about sharing ideas and strategies in their collaborative sessions, and then they are able to return to their classroom with a new activities and feeling reinvigorated. Teacher A related that "although I loving being able to bounce ideas off of teachers, it is something I miss now that it is not there." This same teacher felt there was little impact on the workload expected. Teacher F felt it did not impact her in the classroom at all. She felt as a special education teacher that she is just another adult in the classroom.

When asked if collaboration impacted the workload, 10 teachers stated that it had a positive influence on their workload. They are able to share resources, ideas, and strategies. Six teachers felt that their workload increased because of collaboration. Teacher G reported that "collaboration increases your workload because you have to make the time to participate in the collaborative sessions." However, the same teacher also stated "that through collaboration we are better able to meet the needs of our students."

Sixteen teachers felt they had to make time for the meeting, and by sharing

resources and sharing the creating of activities, it ended up increasing their workload.

Two teachers felt it had not impact on their workload. Both of these teachers were

special education teachers.

The participating teachers were asked if they collaborate on individual lesson

plans. Four teachers answered this question in the negative. Teacher C did not answer this

question, as this teacher does not currently collaborate or has not collaborated in the past.

Thirteen teachers stated that they collaborate on individual lesson plans. Teacher I, a

special education teacher, stated that it makes things easier with her coteacher if they

have discussed the lesson plans previously, especially since they are together in the

classroom for the entire day. Another teacher collaborated on daily lesson plans with a

teacher new to the course, which assists the new teacher a tremendous amount. All

teachers thought their collaborative efforts were at least adequate. Two teachers

mentioned that they felt they could do better and input more in the collaborative sessions.

In all the interviews, it was revealed that for effective collaboration, all teachers need to

be willing and open to participation and to learn from one another. Collaborative sessions

should be a time of sharing and learning for all participants; therefore, all participants

need to enter with an open mind (DuFour et al., 2006a; Hytten, 2011).

Theme 4: Teachers' Perceptions of the Influence of Collaboration on Morale

Theme four concerns teachers' perceptions of the influence of collaboration on

morale. The last questions presented to the participating educators focused upon whether

they perceived that participating in collaboration sessions influenced their morale.

1. Does collaboration influence morale in the workplace?

2. If so, how would you describe theinfluence of collaboration on morale?

Fifteen teachers stated that they felt their participation in the collaborative sessions had influence on their morale. Twelve of these teachers felt it was a positive relationship. Collaboration is a positive and it helps morale was reflected by one teacher. Feeling included as a new teacher was posed as a benefit by another teacher. Another teacher said that collaboration allowed for "fresh eyes on the topic and curriculum." Another teacher felt this collaboration influencing morale should be a goal. This teacher felt there needed to be a modification in how collaboration was done with incorporating discussion about student progress and how to improve their progress. The ability to talk and be positive for each other was related by another teacher. Teacher B felt morale would be higher if teachers were allowed choice to participate in collaboration and not mandated to participate. Teacher H said that collaboration helps them to "feel like pals in the collaborative group and to be able to share ideas freely" was brought up by another teacher. Teacher K felt that morale with collaboration improves when teachers are held accountable f or the process and stated "that someone has to see that collaborative meetings are scheduled and held to be effective."

Although the majority felt there was a positive influence, a negative influence was felt by the other six teachers. Teacher F says "it is just one more thing that has to be done." Teacher D feels because of how she sees her role in the classroom, there is little to no effect. Teacher F is a special education teacher who sees who role more as a teaching assistant than a teacher. Teacher L felt that "The ability of these meetings to

become complaint sessions can create a negative atmosphere and that it depends on the colleagues in the group." Teacher C felt she needed to put her energy towards what she really needs to do, and that collaborating is not beneficial to her or her students. A greater chance for collaboration to lower morale than increase it was felt by another teacher. Another felt the connection between collaboration and morale was negative because of teachers feeling their way is the only way.

Overall, the majority of teachers felt collaboration had a positive effect on their morale. The six teachers who did not the positive influence, all felt that their voices were not heard and did not like collaboration being a requirement. The 12 teachers who did see a positive influence felt theinfluence on their morale in the school. DuFour et al. (2010) state that collaboration has an influence on morale that carries over into the school environment.

Theme 5: Benefits and Barriers to Collaboration

When the teachers were asked if anything interfered with their collaborative efforts in the following questions:

1. Does anything interfere with your ability to collaborate effectively?

2. What benefits, if any, come out of the collaboration?

Eight teachers mentioned time as a major barrier. This included other meetings, paper work, and other commitments such as tutoring students. The unwillingness of fellow teachers to collaborate was stated by five teachers. These teachers stated the unwillingness included fellow teachers who think their ideas are the only ones to share and follow. To a new teacher this can feel oppressive and the new teacher does not feel

confident to share in that type of atmosphere. Teacher E mentioned power issues as a barrier. This teacher felt that everyone needs to be equal in the collaborative group in order to feel they can open up and share ideas. Teacher F relates that since she is not a certified in the subject area that she teams with, that she is not taken seriously. She felt that the subject teachers feel she is not competent enough in the subject area to listen to. Teacher L mentions that these sessions can turn negative and become a complaining session about other topics.

Teachers related some personal feelings about their experiences in collaboration. Teacher B relates:

> That we rarely do much in the way of team building. In many professions people go on retreats. At the high school level we think that is silly. I have had many jobs where that was a part of the job. One year the people I was working with formed some type of group against me and I was left out of collaboration. I have seen other collaboratives that were negative as well.

Teacher D talked about power issues as being an interference that had to be dealt with during the collaborative meetings.

Next, the teachers were asked about benefits to collaboration. Sharing ideas, strategies, learning from other teachers, and talking to other teachers were mentioned as benefits by eight teachers. Higher student scores were mentioned by two teachers along with a greater interest in the course by the students. Pacing and curriculum were mentioned by six of the teachers. They appreciated being able to keep pace with the other teachers and knowing where each was in the curriculum. One teacher mentioned that it

shed light on how teachers perceive their role in the classroom and how to give information to students. Clarity of purpose for her role with working with students with disabilities was mentioned by another teacher.

Teacher H related that she was able to see "the effects of collaboration, willing and positive collaboration. You see higher test scores, more interest, and higher grades." Most teachers shared the same sentiment along with being in the same place in the content with each other in the same subject. "It helps me reflect and to look within. When I meet with my fellow colleagues, I try to learn from them". This scenario was also noted among the majority of the participants. Teachers are teaching each other during collaboration (DuFour et al., 2006b). When teachers meet to collaborate they are learning from each other and sharing their experiences, which is the foundation of the constructivist theory (Dewey, 1967).

Collaborative Sessions and Logs

In addition to interviews, observations of collaborative sessions and analysis of collaborative logs were conducted to validatethe interview findings. In this qualitative study, interviews allowed for dialogue regarding the definitions or morale and collaboration. The observations of the collaborative meetings provided for a direct observation of what was being discussed and the environment surrounding the meeting. The collaborative logs were collected to corroborate theinterviews and meeting observations. Observations were made by me of these meetings while I took field notes. Teachers were asked about their collaborative meetings to include frequency and content of those meetings. The frequency of those meetings is shown in the following Table 4.

Table 4

Frequency of Collaborative Meetings

_____

Frequency	Number of teachers present
Daily	2
Once a week	10
Every 2 weeks	2
Only teacher of subject	3
Does not collaborate	1

_____

As demonstrated by the above chart, the majority of teachers collaborate formally about

once a week. There was one subject area that met once every two weeks. Five teachers

mentioned meeting informally in their responses such as meeting in the hallway between

classes, lunch or in a classroom. The teacher who does not collaborate does not attend the

meetings because this teacher feels her voice is not heard. She felt that she has no input

into what is being taught as she is a special education teacher she feels she only has input

into how to teach it differently. Because she was not consulted, she felt she is only there

in the room; she did not attend the meetings. All of the meetings took place in one group

member's classroom for accessibility and ease.

The sustenance or topics of the meetings fell into similar categories for all the

teachers as shown in the following Table 5.

Table 5

Topics Discussed in Collaborative Sessions

Topic discussed	Number of teachers who discussed
Student/test data	5
Standardized tests	2
Pacing of course	5
Curriculum	6
Reflection	2
Tests	8
Unit plans	3
Special Education Students	3
Coordinate laboratory equipment	1
Activities	4
Students	3
Lesson plans	3

Overall, most of the topics discussed involve the curriculum and planning how to implement it and assess the students on that content. According to the participating teachers, the discussions revolved around the planning and required paperwork more than the reflection over lesson implementation or student data. Only five teachers mentioned student data as one of the topics, which is a major area of collaborative discussion according to experts such as DuFour et al. (2004).

When asked if there was a leader of their collaborative sessions, all but one group of teachers stated that it was the senior teacher in their group. The other group stated that all members of that collaborative are leaders. This type of attitude made all members feel important and that their ideas and feelings are going to be taken seriously.

When asked about disagreements, all but two teachers stated that disagreements were talked out and compromises were reached or the members decided to agree to disagree on that particular area. One teacher mentioned that in his particular group, the other members of the group would refuse to listen and cooperate. The leader would exert her will on the rest of the group. This made it difficult for any relevant discussion to take place.

I collected collaborative meeting logs from the meetings she was able to observe. A total of eight teachers were observed due to scheduling and the collaborative teams not meeting. One group discussed the standards, testing, pacing, unit plans, activities and the final exam. Along with that, differentiation was discussed. Another group also talked about the final exam along with standardized testing. Another group also talked about standardized testing, the final exam and laboratory activities.

I heard students mentioned, but not student data in two of the groups. Students were mentioned in relation to discipline problems and how to handle them, along with the frustration this created. Many of the topics that were related to me during theinterviews were not observed in the observational meetings. This is possibly due to being able to only observe one meeting. The field notes recorded by me allowed theinterview data to be corroborated with the meeting sessions. The difference between the two types of data was of minimal significance.

The meetings logs were also analyzed to corroborate the data collected inthe interviews and observations. The majority of the logs documented items on the logs such as who would write the next test, what chapter or chapters they would cover next, and

share a worksheet or activity they would do. This fulfilled the requirement set forth by the administration of the school. These logs rarely documented student data being shared or discussed. A major part of collaboration is discussing student data as stated by DuFour et al. (2006a) and Conzemius & O'Neill (2002).

Discrepant Data

The analysis of the data collected revealed two discrepant cases. The first being a teacher who felt the leader of the collaborative made the decisions without input from him. The second was a teacher who felt she was not listened to at the meetings and did not attend anymore Identifying and analyzing discrepant data is an integral part of validity testing in qualitative testing (Maxwell, 2012). Discrepant data needs to be considered along with the supporting data as to whether the conclusion of the study is plausible or needs to be modified.

Teacher C noted that there was a power struggle in his collaborative sessions. The leader of the group made the decisions and the rest of the group was to follow what they did. This particular teacher, who had many years of experience, was not allowed to share his expertise or ideas. The potential for power struggles is strong in this type of environment, especially when time is a factor. The definition of collaboration states that sharing should be taking place (DuFour et al., 2006a: Martin-Kniep, 2008).

Teacher F also felt her voice was not being heard. She no longer attended collaborative sessions. The feeling of not being heard was common or being able to discuss special education students was felt by the special education teachers who participated in the study.

Thirty-three percent of the teachers did not feel the sessions were useful due to their content. There was a tendency for the sessions to become complaint sessions about students, no sharing of strategies or ideas, not talking about student data, and taking time out of the school day.

Evidence of Quality

This study followed procedures to assure accuracy of the data. The data was collected in the forms of interviews, observations of collaborative sessions and meeting logs. The participants were chosen due to their accessibility to me and also their willingness. They were also considered colleagues who would be truthful in their answers and not stating what they felt I wanted to hear.

The guiding questions used are provided in appendices B and C, and s collaborative log that was utilized by the staff is shown in appendix D. These questions became the basis for the themes that I discovered as I reviewed the interview transcripts. I read through the interview transcripts and collected observation logs and employed taxonomic codes over specific textual examples that suggested patterns with participant responses. Once these patterns became manifest and after review of the constructivist conceptual framework, I began to develop themes as responses to the research questions. Any discrepancies that I found were noted: one-third of the teachers did not enjoy the process of collaboration or have a vision for its usefulness. As stated earlier, these teachers felt the collaborative sessions easily become complaint or venting sessions about student behavior. The teachers did not share strategies or ideas that would help students

understand the concepts that were being taught, not was student data discussed. The sessions became simply a format to share the workload according to these teachers.

After the coding of the data and development of themes, member checking was performed to ensure that all participants were aware of their answers and the conclusions that I developed from these findings. Member checking is a simple technique that is often used in case study research to improve validity (Merriam, 2002)   All participants were asked to review the draft and provide feedback of the relationship of the larger findings with relationship to their own answers to the interview questions. An audit trail including evidence of teacher responses and the transcriptions has also been preserved. Finally, all guidelines established by Walden University's IRB have been adhered to with the collection of this data.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to determine how teachers perceive theinfluence of collaboration on their morale. The data, which was organized by theinterview questions, collaborative meeting logs, and theobservations, suggests that there is a strong influence between teachers participating in collaborative discussions and their morale. With 12 teachers, or 67%, stating that it is a positive influence leads me to posit that participation in collaborative sessions has a positive influence on a teachers' morale. It appears that the benefits outweigh the barriers that are present to the collaborative process.

One of the major benefits is creating a collegial atmosphere, mentioned by more than one teacher. One teacher related to the group as pals. This was a strong collaborative

group that shared their ideas freely as well as the workload. This created a collegial group that worked well together and had a positive attitude.

Another benefit was to new teachers as mentioned by two of the teachers. It assisted new teachers with pacing their courses, writing lesson plans, unit plans, and assessments. These sessions created a mentor or mentors for these teachers in an informal way.

The major barrier to collaboration in this atmosphere was time. The majority of the teachers mentioned this as significant. The teachers in the study would probably not object to collaboration if they had adequate time to participate. The benefits of collaboration need to override this barrier for it have an influence.

Participants noted potential barriers to collaboration including the unwillingness of participants to collaborate. They collaborated or attended the discussions because it was mandated by administration. This group felt it was something they had to do to satisfy their job requirements as stated in their job descriptions. An understanding of the benefits of collaboration is imperative to this particular group of teachers.

I saw a difference between the interviews and the observations. The topics stated to be discussed was much larger and longer than items actually discussed when I was present. This could be related to myself only observing one session. I felt the sessions were being held to just hold the sessions to satisfy the administrative requirements. Again, these teachers need to realize the full benefits of collaboration that can assist them in their jobs (Conzemius & O'Neill, 2002; DuFour e al., 2010; Eaker et al., 2002).

The next section will discuss what these findings mean along with suggestions for further research and study.

Section 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Overview of the Study

Today, teachers still work in isolation in their classroom with little interaction between colleagues: "in an age where reform is the object of an endless variety of reform efforts, it is still the classroom teacher working in isolation, who often determines what does or does not enter the classroom" (Howe, 2007, p. 98). Even though there are many reform methods entering our schools, teachers are making the final decision of what enters and does not enter the classroom on their own. Collaboration and professional learning communities are attempts to reduce my isolationism that pervades many schools. Collaboration allows teachers to talk in collegial groups to share experiences, ideas, lesson plans, unit plans, assessments, and student data in a nonjudgmental atmosphere. Teachers are the heart of the solution and need to work together to make a difference (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). This is the major premise behind the collaborative and professional learning community program in the school.

In this study, I focused on how teachers working in a public high school perceived the influence of collaboration on their morale in the workplace. My intention of this study was to establish whether or not teachers participating in collaborative discussions felt that these discussions had an influence on their morale in the school setting. As the findings signify, the majority or 67% of the teachers felt that their participation had a positive influence on their morale, where as 33% felt collaboration did not have a positive influence on their morale. A collaborative structure exists at this particular school because it is required and mandated by the administration. Participation in these sessions

is included in the evaluation of the teachers at this school. These findings do not intend to say that results would be similar at other public high schools.

Section 1 of this study revealed that teachers leave the profession at a high rate due to job dissatisfaction and low morale (McCreight, 2000). The state that this study took place in had a turnover rate of 41.5% in the first 10 years. Two questions were answered during this study. The first question addressed how collaboration affects teachers. Question 2 asked about the benefits and/or barriers teachers see to the process of collaboration. The theoretical framework for this study was the constructivist theory where the learner builds on prior knowledge in a social contest (Dewey, 1967).

In Section 2 of this study, I reviewed literature on the subject of collaboration and morale. There was little mention of the influence of collaboration on a teacher's morale. Some authors alluded to the consideration that participating in collaboration should improve a teacher's morale, but no definitive study was found. Benefits and barriers to collaboration were researched, and results revealed that the main barrier was time to collaborate and meet with peers.

Research design and methodology were discussed in Section 3 of the study. This is a qualitative study grounded in the constructivist theory. High school teachers at a school in a Southeastern United States participated in the study. These 18 teachers sat for interviews with me. I observed collaborative meetings, collected the meeting logs from those meetings, and recorded field notes while there.

Findings of the study were discussed in Section 4. The different types of data, as mentioned previously, were triangulated to compare interviews to what was actually

performed and discussed in the collaborative meetings. The data show and suggest a strong influence between teachers participating in the collaborative sessions and their morale. There were only two discrepant teachers who felt their voices were not being heard during the collaborative sessions.

In this section, I will discuss the findings of the study in relation to my two research questions, what these findings mean to the teaching community, and what future revisions are foreseen for this area of study.

Interpretation of Findings

In this section, I will discuss and interpret the findings in relation to the two research questions. The two questions relate theinfluence that collaboration has on teachers and the benefits and barriers to collaboration. This case study was grounded in the constructivist theory, which states that people can learn from each other and their peers (Dewey, 1967).   That is the basis of collaboration and teachers working together (Dufour et al., 2006a, Huffman, 2003). Teachers working together can learn from each other during the meetings. The teachers can learn strategies, best techniques, share the workload, and have a better feeling about themselves and their workplace.

Influence of Collaboration on Teachers

Collaboration, for the purpose of this study, is defined as working together to achieve common goals with the purpose of all participants learning. DuFour et al. (2008) stated that collaborative groups are the backbone of a school whose members work towards a common goal for all. All the teachers essentially repeated this definition in their own words. One interesting item I noted was that five of the six special education

teachers mentioned special education students in their definitions while general education teachers did not mention them.

Pugach and Johnson (1995) alleged that collaboration was finally being recognized for its importance in improving the educational process and achievement of teachers and students. Teachers are being asked to open their classroom doors and step into a conference room and share their wealth of information, experiences, and knowledge. These authors revealed that there are five reasons for teachers to collaborate that include support in demanding times, creating plans for exceptional students, implementation of new strategies, collaboration of the general education teacher and special educator to benefit the exceptional student, and the sharing of new knowledge (p. 11). The collaborative process will ease stress and create an environment more conducive to learning. Teachers will also be more inclined to try new strategies when they have support from other teachers. Pugach and Johnson mentioned working towards the goals of special education students as well as the general population. Howard and Potts (2009) posited that five items need to be addressed in collaboration in coteaching situations. These items include the standards, assessment, accommodations/modifications, instructional strategies, and logistics. The above mentioned items were not addressed in the collaborative meetings that I observed. The sessions were more general in nature, where the particular students would need to be addressed to cover the necessary items. A meeting between the general education teacher and special education teacher would serve these purposes better, and then questions and suggestions could be brought up at the more general collaborative meeting.

This public high school was asking teachers to open their doors and share with each other. At least two teachers mentioned the unwillingness of other teachers to collaborate with each other, so they never or rarely saw their collaborative partners. One teacher did not attend collaborative discussions because of the unwillingness of other teachers to listen to her ideas and experiences. The majority of the participants saw collaboration as a positive step towards their morale and student achievement. Five teachers related that they appreciated an informal session over the required, mandated session that they were currently involved in. Sturko and Gregson (2009) also found that teachers were able to talk about day to day experiences and issues in an informal session, rather than a more formal meeting. The teachers felt they could be more open and honest in the more intimate, personal setting and ask questions and share experience.

Benefits and/or Barriers Teachers See in the Process of Collaboration

Elliott (2005) stated that there are many benefits to working in collaborative teams. These benefits include that the practice of collaboration is job-embedded, teachers share knowledge and expertise, teachers feel empowered to strengthen their practices, teachers can address challenging issues, student achievement is affected, and teachers look for biases in their practice and explore how all students are learning. According to Inger (1993), there are several benefits for teachers who participate in collaborative sessions. These benefits include the construction of new knowledge, preparation to assist each other, a reduction of planning time, an increase in a pool of shared resources, being more open to change, and teachers being willing to assist new teachers. Williams (2006) added another four benefits to collaboration: buy-in, synergy, team accomplishments, and

security and/or satisfaction. The major aspect in these benefits is that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Collaborating will assist teachers and make them feel more secure and have a higher job satisfaction level.

The majority of teachers in this study appreciated being able to share strategies and ideas to bring to their classrooms. This included ways to approach a topic, common assessments, activities, and laboratory activities. Six teachers, however, felt their workload increased because of collaboration. Dufour (2011) stated that collaboration should decrease the workload as it is becoming shared among the group of teachers. Two of these teachers are also the teachers who do not collaborate due to the unwillingness on the part of their collaborative partners.

According to Elliott (2005), the challenges or barriers include time, administrative support, translating research into practice, developing practices, identifying negativism, and stopping patterns of nonproductivity. A collegial and trusting atmosphere allows teachers to share their experiences, stories, and knowledge so everyone can have the opportunity to learn from each other. Guidelines need to be set at the start of the process so that all members know what is expected and required of them. These guidelines include that members will attend the meetings, pay attention to each other without interruption, speak and relate stories only relating to themselves, place no blame or judgment on others, are open to comments and interpretations from other members, and remember that the proceedings are confidential.

The major barrier stated by the participants in this study was the time to collaborate and Howe (2007), who stated the following: "The most fundamental need for

effective collaboration is time built in to the school day for teachers to regularly meet and

work together. Without time built-in to the school schedule, no meaningful, sustained

collaboration can occur" (p. 103). Administration at this school supported and required

collaboration to take place. Before the administration made changes, collaboration did

not take place during the school day, unless it was during lunch time. Teachers usually

met before and after school. This made it difficult for some teachers who had child care

scheduling, coaching responsibilities, and other time commitments. Since this study,

these collaborative processes have been further implemented and now include more

teachers, and generally the response has been positive. The largest benefit reported by the

administration and teachers is that this process has created a larger sense of community;

collaboration is an effective way to reduce that isolationism that permeates the profession

of teaching (DuFour et al., 2006a).

Implications for Social Change

The findings of the study show that collaboration has a positive influence on

morale for teachers. Teachers should embrace these findings and use collaboration as a

way to utilize their experiences to help each other in a collegial atmosphere. With a more

collegial atmosphere and support from others, teacher retention should become higher,

and there should be less turnover in the schools. The atmosphere of trust and respect that

comes from collaboration will alleviate some of the stress that teachers feel on a daily

basis (Conzemius & O'Neill, 2002; DuFour et al., 2006b; Jones-Smith, 2011). The school

building will be a happier environment for all involved and lower the turnover rate in the

schools, which have been noted to be up to 50% of new teachers leaving by the end of

their 5th year (Fulton et al., 2005). Teachers will benefit the most from collaboration by having a more positive outlook and higher job satisfaction. Students also benefit by having happier and more positive teachers in the collaborative environment that is positive for learning.

Benefits and barriers to collaboration have been identified in the literature section of this study. Time was stated as the major barrier in the literature and the participants of the study. Hence, schools need to address this factor and hopefully find a way to allow and schedule teachers to collaborate during their scheduled day (Conzemius & O'Neill, 2002).

Collaboration needs to become a way of life for schools, and it presently is not (DuFour et al., 2011). Teachers work in isolation still without support of other teachers and administration. Creating a collaborative community within a school will not only assist teachers in creating a more collegial atmosphere but will also create a commitment to their personal development (DuFour et al., 2006b). Collaboration allows teachers to confront negative feelings, values, and beliefs in a direct approach and offer various positive alternatives (Grossmanm et al., 2001; Howe, 2007; Williams, 2006). This qualitative case study shows that collaboration has a positive influence on morale in the school. This positive atmosphere filters down to students so learning is also positively influenced. From this study, administrators and teachers can implement new ways to create time for collaboration so teachers do not see it as a burden but instead the helping hand it is intended to be; collaboration is a positive to individual teachers as they are learning from each other, building a collegial atmosphere in which to work and gaining

confidence in themselves and a better feeling about themselves. With teachers feeling

better about themselves, the atmosphere of the workplace becomes more positive, which

improves employee morale. The impact then will become felt by students because as

teachers collaborate and have greater morale, they provide a greater sense of community

and an environment more conducive to creating positive relationships and ultimately

student learning. Since this study, these original collaborative groups have either been

kept or broadened to include more teachers; ultimately, the school administration

recognizes the importance of collaboration and has made specific choices to continue or

increase this process.

Recommendations for Further Study

This particular study was at a public high school. That does not mean that these

results would represent every other public high school. To see this study repeated in

different public high schools in different types of areas would determine if these data

from this study pertain to other public high schools. This particular school is in a metro-

urban area with a mixture of socioeconomic level students. The results compared to an

affluent school versus a rural school would be vital to compare.

The mention of special education students by the special education teachers was

an unexpected and refreshing surprise to me. I did not consider the special education

population separately, nor was it mentioned by the general education teachers. Special

education teachers looked at collaboration from a different viewpoint than the general

educators. The special education teachers wanted to consider individual students during

the collaborative sessions rather than with the individual general education teacher.

Another study should compare this study strictly between special education teachers and general education teachers.

When attending the collaborative sessions, I noted that many topics, especially student achievement, were not discussed. On the other hand, at each session, student discipline was discussed. I noted that the sessions were basically dividing up the work amongst the group. It would be prudent to repeat this study with a group of teachers who are trained in the art of professional development. I observed several groups during their collaborative sessions. Through these observations, it came to light that professional development is essential to a successful collaborative session. At least two of the teachers felt they did not need training in the collaborative session. One teacher stated that she felt her voice was not heard at the meetings and no longer attended. The second teacher felt that one person took over the group and only her opinions and decisions were executed. As an observer, noting the topics discussed, it is imperative that teachers be trained in the art of collaborating with each other for the goal of student achievement and teacher development.

A study of teachers with common planning time would also be beneficial to the current research. To create this type of schedule is an administrative nightmare, but it could prove beneficial to the students and that is the main goal.

This particular study contained one interview per teacher and one observation per teacher. This should be expanded upon in the future. There are possible outside issues that could influence teacher responses to the interview.

This study would be useful to the majority of educators, especially at the school and school system it was conducted. There is evidence that collaboration has a positive influence on morale. The study could be disseminated by presenting it to fellow colleagues throughout the school system, especially the home school. It could also be utilized by the school district professional development personnel to present. Publication of the study will allow even more educators to see the evidence and build upon it for the future and betterment of the workplace. Administrators need to take a note to see if there is a way to schedule teachers so they can collaborate during the school day.

Recommendation for Action

The results of this study will be shared with the administration of the participating school along with the respective board of education members. Sharing the results will demonstrate the influence collaboration has on the morale of teachers in one of district's schools. This sharing and review of the data will determine if there is a need for professional development in the area of collaboration. Professional development will allow teachers to see what items and discussions belong in a collaborative session to make that sessions most effective.

Participating teachers will have the results of the studied shared with them. These teachers will have the chance to see how collaboration has affected their morale in a positive or negative manner. A better understanding of utilizing collaboration to its fullest and most usefulness will result.

The results could also be shared with the other teachers in the participating school or district. Sharing this information will allow teachers to understand the role of

collaboration in our schools. This study may motivate other teachers to start collaborating with other teachers or continue collaborating.

Reflection

The study provided me the opportunity to gain an understanding of the various research methodologies. At the start of the process, I felt the study would take on a quantitative approach utilizing a survey approach. After studying the various methodologies, it became clear that a qualitative case study approach would be more appropriate. It allowed me to pull together the experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2011). The literature review provided current research on collaboration, morale, qualitative research design, and constructivist theory that allowed for an in-depth analysis and interpretation of the data.

Being a teacher who had worked in schools with and without collaboration, I had personal biases regarding theinfluence of collaboration on morale. Using theinterviews, observations, and logs maintained the validity and reliability of the research. Creswell (2012) states that a qualitative study allows for rich data from the teacher's opinions. There was an interview protocol that was followed, which provided guiding questions that the participants answered in their honest and open opinions. The observations were guided by the collaborative log and the required data the log called for.

The qualitative case study approach allowed me to utilize the perspectives and opinions of the participating teachers and not my own biases. This study changed my thinking regarding the influence of collaboration on morale. The literature review, the

data collection process and data analysis process allowed me to gain a better understanding of the research process and my interpretation of the data.

Conclusion

This study adds to the available research on collaboration and teachers attitudes. But there is more to study and determine as to whether collaboration affects morale. This study shows that there is a correlation towards the positive. The more positive a teacher is, the more positive a classroom environment will be for the students.

There are barriers to overcome for positive collaboration. Time is the main one. Some teachers do not like to be told that they have to collaborate, that it has to be at a particular time and in a particular place. Teachers are there for the students, that goal needs to be kept in mind as studies in this area proceed.

I was concerned about personal bias when analyzing the data. This was minimized and downplayed by utilizing triangulation to look at the various forms of data obtained during the study. The participants were all colleagues of mine and there was concern that they might say what they felt I was looking for during the interviews. The triangulation and confidentiality downplayed that possible aspect.

My thinking was changed during this study. Beforehand, I felt every teacher would perceive collaboration as a morale booster. Not all teachers felt that way and were able to state the reasons for their thinking. It was also surprising to see that special education teachers perceived the process in a different way than general education teachers.

This study shows a significant positive influence between collaboration and a teacher's morale. This influences how a teacher performs the job, meets and greats fellow educators, and interacts with students.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

Teacher's Perceptions of theInfluence of Teacher Collaboration on Teacher Morale

I agree to participate in a doctoral study entitled "Teachers' Perceptions ofthe influence of Teacher Collaboration on Teacher Morale" that is being conducted by Alison Goldstein (678-494-7844). Ms. Goldstein is a doctoral student at Walden University and the results will be submitted as part of the requirements for the Doctorate in Education Degree. I understand that I do not have to participate in this study and may withdraw at any time without reason.

The purpose of this study is to study teachers' perceptions ofthe influence between teacher collaboration and teacher morale. There are no benefits except the opportunity to participate and exam the connection between collaboration and morale of teachers.

No risks are foreseen by participating in this study. The results of my participation in this study will be kept confidential and will not be in an identifiable form without my prior consent. The data resulting from this study will be kept for up to five years.

I (Alison Goldstein) will answer any further questions about the study, now or during the course of the study. She can be reached at or via email at

My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Signature of participant/date

_____

Signature of researcher/date

Appendix B: Interview Questions Collaborating Teachers

Background Information:
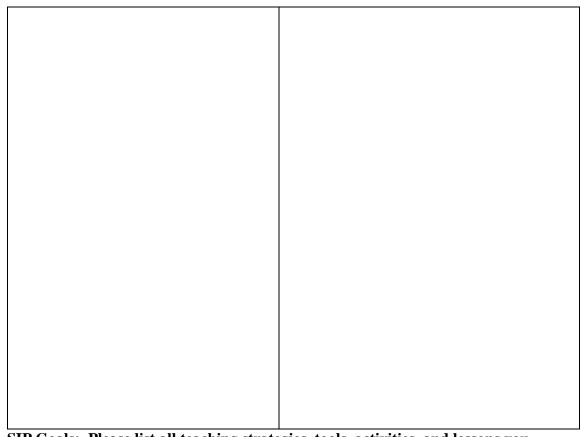
1. What is your educational background?

2. What subject do you teach?

3. How long have you been teaching at this school?

4. Have you taught anywhere else? If so, for how long?

Collaboration and Morale Questions

1. What is your definition of collaboration?

2. What is your definition of morale?

3. How often do you meet with the other teachers you collaborate with?

4. Where and when do you meet?

5. Describe a typical meeting?

6. What would you say are the primary topics you discuss?

7. Would you classify anyone as the leader of your discussions?

8. Describe how disagreements are dealt with?

9. How does collaboration impact your classroom?

10. How does collaboration impact your workload?

11. Do you collaborate on individual classroom lessons?

12. How do you feel about your collaborative efforts?

13. What would you say aids in your collaborative efforts?

14. Does anything interfere with your ability to collaborate effectively?

15. What benefits, if any, come out of the collaboration?

16. Does collaboration influence morale in the workplace?

17. If so, how would you describe the influence of collaboration on morale?

Appendix C: Interview Questions Noncollaborating Teachers

Background Information

1. What is your educational background?

2. What subject do you teach?

3. How long have you been teaching at this school?

4. Have you taught anywhere else? If so, for how long?

Collaboration and Morale Questions

1. What is your definition of collaboration?

2. What is your definition of morale?

3. Describe what you think happens at a collaborative session?

4. Describe how you think collaboration would impact your classroom?

5. Describe how you think collaboration would impact your workload?

6. How do you feel about collaboration?

7. What benefits do you think come from collaboration?

8. Does collaboration influence morale in the workplace?

9. If so, how would you describe this relationship?

Appendix D: Collaborative Meeting Log

Course _____ **Meeting Pattern**_____

Date _____ **Time**_____ **Room Location** _____

Members: Please sign full name below when present.

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Topics to be addressed/discussed (Suggestions: Standards, Instructional Strategies, Assessments, Essential Questions, Pacing Issues, Tips of the Week, etc.)	Notes

SIP Goals: Please list all teaching strategies, tools, activities, and lessons you provide for your students that support any/all SIP goals in your classes.

Goal #1: All students will demonstrate increased proficiency in problem-solving and analysis	Goal #2: All students will demonstrate increased proficiency in vocabulary development, reading comprehension, and writing skills	Goal #3: Organize the learning environment to meet the needs of all students

| | | |
| | | |

All members should keep a copy for his/her records. Return a copy to Dept.

head at the end of each month

Appendix E: Sample Transcript

Hi

Hello

I thank you for coming to do this for me.

You are welcome.

This is an interview about your perceptions of the effect of collaboration on morale. I have some guiding questions to guide our interview. This interview is tape-recorded. Is that acceptable with you?

That's fine.

To start with I will be gathering some background information and then we will start with questions on collaboration and morale. I will also be taking some notes while we talk.

Are you ready to get started?

Sure

Background Information:

Interviewer: What is your educational background?

I have a BS in foreign language education and a concentration in Spanish

Interviewer: What subject do you teach?

Spanish

Interviewer: How long have you been teaching at this school?

7 year

Interviewer: Have you taught anywhere else? If so, for how long?

Palmer MS 3/ JJ Daniel MS 1 yr

Collaboration and Morale Questions

Interviewer: What is your definition of collaboration?

The way I look at collaboration is coming together to see what are the best practices and strategies and share those and what has worked and not worked in the classroom, learn from the experience of other teachers, learn from others, and hopefully walk out with a greater understanding of what you have been doing and gaining knowledge from teachers you are collaborating with

Interviewer: What is your definition of morale?

The overall emotions or feelings that the teachers or staff has regarding a particular topic, what is taking place in the school, decision making, what input we have into decision making, moral plays an essential part

When morale is low, whether or not let it affect how you perform, it can affect how you in many ways in how you perform, ways it is manifested and how it is going to be brought into the classroom

Interviewer: How often do you meet with the other teachers you collaborate with?

Last semester—every week to every two weeks;; that has dwindled down due to less and less time to collaborate due to other responsibilities that has taken us away from collaboration and planning

Interviewer: Where and when do you meet?

My classroom or with other teacher in her classroom

Interviewer: Describe a typical meeting?

We have different levels

We would collaborate to see how best to prepare for next level

We would reflect

We would discuss what we did that week and how it worked and how we would like to change it, discuss upcoming quizzes and unit exams, issues with students such as discipline issues

Planned for that unit

Interviewer: What would you say are the primary topics you discuss?

Vocabulary is a very part of our lesson plans and what students need to learn, we discuss different ways to help students comprehend, use, internalize the vocabulary, ways that we can use to differentiate

Interviewer: Would you classify anyone as the leader of your discussions?

No; depends on topic—teacher having a problem in the classroom-that teacher may lead more than another for that session

Interviewer: Describe how disagreements are dealt with?

There are disagreements, plenty of them

The main goal and objective was to have common exams that is where the disagreements came as to whether those common assessments would meet the need of the particular settings in each classroom. We were looking at issues with a one size fits all philosophy. I had trouble. What works for one classroom may not work for all classrooms. Having those collaboratives took away from other things. Do what we need to do what we need to do for our students

Interviewer: How does collaboration impact your classroom?

Has helped me in reflection and to bring in, has helped me make necessary changes and exchanging ideas with different teachers. Just because I've been doing something doesn't make it the best. It has allowed me to grow as well as my students.

Interviewer: How does collaboration impact your workload?

It has added a lot more because of the time factor. It felt that we were going around and around an issue on something that we just needed to move on. It has added to the work load.

Interviewer: Do you collaborate on individual classroom lessons?

Yes.

Interviewer: How do you feel about your collaborative efforts?

We did a lot more collaborating at the beginning of the semester. My efforts—I could have put a lot more effort into it.

Interviewer: What would you say aids in your collaborative efforts?

It helps me reflect and to look within. When I meet with my fellow colleagues. I try to learn from them.

Interviewer: Does anything interfere with your ability to collaborate effectively?

Other things we have had to do, other priorities, other meetings, time

We stopped meeting regularly because the students come first, we have so many students struggling, and I have made myself available to them

Interviewer: What benefits, if any, come out of the collaboration?

Again, just gaining knowledge from your colleagues, learning form colleagues

Interviewer: Is there a relationship between your participation in collaborative

discussions and your morale?

Yes.

Interviewer: If so, how would you describe this relationship?

Morale lately is low, all collaboratives lately have been all consuming with what we are

all concerned about, we are all feeding off of that negativity, in this department we try to

be positive because students come first.

We have gotten into situations where there is one more thing to do, not how we can be

better teachers in the classroom.

Many times it is about one more task at hand that we have to document because this is

what we have to do.

I need to the time and energy to concentrate on what I need to do, it is not benefitting me

or my students.

Appendix F: Taxonomic Codes for Analysis

Collaboration:

C: collaboration

Cc: collaboration and classroom

Cn: collaboration is negative

Cp: collaboration is position

Morale:

M: morale

Mn: morale is negative

Mp: morale is positive

Benefits:

B: benefits

Bl: learning from others

Bs: sharing ideas

Barriers:

Ba: barriers

Bat: time as a barrier

Bav: not being heard

Appendix G: Major Themes

1. Definition of Collaboration

2. Definition of Morale

3. Collaboration and the Classroom

4. Teachers' Perceptions of the influence of Collaboration on Morale

5. Benefits and Barriers to collaboration

Curriculum Vitae

Alison M. Goldstein

EDUCATION

Walden University
Doctoral Candidate: Teacher Leadership

Georgia State University
Science Education

Kennesaw State University
Science Education: Biology

State University of New York at Plattsburgh
Masters in Management
B.S. Medical Technology
Internship: Berkshire Medical Center, Pittsfield, MA

EXPERIENCE

Red Bank Catholic High School
112 Broad St.
Red Bank, NY

I am currently teaching courses in Advanced Placement Environmental Science, Marine Science and Concepts in Science. I have had the opportunity to attend the New Jersey Science Teachers Convention to attend several workshops. I had the privilege to attend a workshop presented by National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration at the National Aquarium in Baltimore, Md.

Mercer County Technical Schools Health Science Academy
1085 Old Trenton Rd
Trenton, NJ

September 2012 to 2013
Teacher I currently taught courses in Anatomy and Physiology, Biology and Microbiology in association with Mercer County Community College and University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey. I also serve as the Health Occupation Students of

America Advisor for the school. I serve on the Health Science Academy Advisory Council and Technology Committee.

Kumon
217 Clarksville Road
West Windsor, NJ 08550

Assistant I worked part time at this location as an assistant/grader. This includes grading, assisting students, and assisting center director as necessary.

Bishop Ahr High School
1 Tingley Lane
Edison, NJ 08820

September 2011 to July 2012
Teacher Bishop Ahr High School. Taught courses in AP Biology and Honors Biology to ninth and twelfth graders, ninth grade advisor to assist students in acclimating to the high school environment, provided mentoring to new and novice teachers.

Green Brook Township Public Schools
132 Jefferson Ave.
Green Brook, NJ 08812

September 2010 to 2011
Teacher Green Brook Middle School. Taught science curriculum to sixth, seventh and eighth graders with topics including Environmental Science, Chemistry, Weather, Electricity, Life Science and Physical Science.
Member of Mentoring committee, Instructional Support committee, Science and Engineering Committee. Assistant with the Robotics club.

Cobb County School District
514 Glover St.
Marietta, GA 30066

August 2006-September 2010
Teacher Kell High School. Taught courses in AP Environmental Science, Environmental Science, Biology, Conceptual Physics and Oceanography. Member of SIP, Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, Scheduling and Character education, and advisement committees. Member of textbook adoption committee for the school district. Facilitator for cluster in-service days focusing on vertical teaming. Work with lead teacher on

collecting and analyzing data for the school improvement plan. Currently part of a committee revising the Physics curriculum.

August 2001 - 2006
Teacher Osborne High School. Taught courses in Biology, Zoology, Physical Science, Anatomy and Physiology, and Astronomy.   Member of data, attendance and character education committees. Participated in writing curriculum for Picasso in various science courses. Taught remedial summer school for the Georgia High School Graduation Test in Science.

August 2000 - 2001
Substitute Teacher: Durham, Awtrey, Lost Mountain, Pine Mountain Middle Schools and Harrison High School. Completed 100% of assignments in various classroom settings.

Emory Adventist Hospital
3949 South Cobb Drive
Smyrna, GA 30080
October 1998-May 2000

Laboratory Supervisor technical functions of a laboratory that performed Hematology and Blood Bank. Maintained rigorous state inspection procedures, implemented new instrumentation, developed a quality assurance program, and maintained blood inventories. Managed staffing, scheduling and training for department

Vencor Hospital Pittsburgh
Oakdale, PA
July 1997 to April 1998

Medical Technologist patient testing at a long term acute care facility. Created Blood Bank Laboratory Department. Oversee point of care testing. Conducted chemistry, hematology, therapeutic drug monitoring, coagulation and urinalysis procedures.

Westat
Rockville, MD
January 1996-July 1997

Clinical Laboratory Analyst contracted through Westat by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention to perform a National Inventory of Clinical Laboratory Testing Services for the Eastern Ohio, Western Pennsylvania, and West Virginia region.   On-site laboratory inspection and collection of data.

HealthAmerica
Pittsburgh, PA
January 1995-September 1996

Medical Technologist patient testing at an 11 physician office of a large HMO.
Laboratory Quality Improvement Committee and the Laboratory Department Committee
representative. Oversee the quality assurance program and quality control program at four
office sites.

Ridley-Lowell Business and Technical Institute
Binghamton, New York
May 1994 - July 1994

Instructor: Medical Assistant students in the Laboratory Procedures for physician's
office. This included infection control, microbiology, urinalysis, phlebotomy,
hematology and ethics. This included classroom instruction along with laboratory time.

United Medical Associates
Johnson City, NY
September 1992 - July 1994

Laboratory Manager: administrative and technical operation of a laboratory that serviced
a 60 physician group. Met New York State and CLIA '88 regulations. Managed patient,
physician and staff relations, quality assurance program, continuing education program,
recruited new employees and coordinated specimen collection and laboratory test results
with on time efficiency. Member of the safety committee and chart organization
committee. Initiated the design and the renovation of a new laboratory. Created
procedure manuals for all areas of the laboratory including Chemistry, Immunology,
Hematology, Coagulation, Urinalysis and Microbiology

CPF/Metpath
Johnson City, NY
April 1989 - September 1992

Laboratory Supervisor: technical functions of a laboratory that performed Hematology,
Chemistry, Immunology, Urinalysis and Coagulation. Maintained a continuing education
program, updated procedures, implemented new instrumentation, improved client
relations, developed a quality assurance program, presented education seminars for
clients and staff, implemented OSHA Bloodborne Pathogen protocol and maintained a
sample sort department.

Lourdes Hospital
Binghamton, NY
November 1986 - April 1989

Medical Technologist performed in all departments: Blood Bank, Microbiology, Chemistry, Hematology, Coagulation, Urinalysis, Immunology and Special Chemistry. Maintained appropriate quality control, maintenance of instrumentation, proper protocol to achieve accurate and timely results and instructed new employees and MLT students.

Champlain Valley Physicians Hospital Medical Center
Plattsburgh, NY
August 1983 - November 1986

Medical Technologist performed Chemistry, Hematology and Blood Bank maintaining proper protocol to achieve accurate and timely results, maintaining appropriate quality control, maintenance of instrumentation and instruction of new employees and MLT students. Maintained donor program which included blood drives, walk-in donors and call-in donors. In charge of department in the absence of the Supervisor.

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS
New Jersey Educators Association
Golden Key National Honor Society