Active collaborative teaching

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Abstract

Todd R. Slimm
Active Collaborative Teaching
2000
Dr. Ronald Capasso
School Administration

The purpose of this study was to determine if the effects of teachers collaborating would have an affect on professional knowledge (pedagogy) and teacher efficacy. Teachers were exposed to three programs designed to promote collaboration (teachers talking about teaching and learning). The entire school staff was introduced to the program with 29 participants in the actual data study. Data was gathered through a questionnaire/survey/interview process. The major method of data analysis was tallies, percentages, and personal comments during interviews. The study found that the three programs had an effect on teacher collaboration. All three programs were found to be of professional value. All three programs caused teachers to talk about teaching and learning. Teacher talk sessions yielded the highest professional value. The professional literature impacted the most members of the group.
Mini-Abstract

Todd R. Slimm

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The purpose of this study was to determine if the effects of teachers collaborating would have an affect on professional knowledge and teacher efficacy. Teachers were exposed to three programs designed to promote collaboration. The study found that the programs were professionally worthy and had an effect on teacher collaboration.
Acknowledgments

The intern wishes to acknowledge the many persons that made this research study possible. Thanks to the staff at Downe Township Schools for their participation and input, without whom, there would be no study. Many thanks to Dr. Stephen Berkowitz, my mentor, confidant, and major supporter through the entire process. In appreciation of Dr. Ronald Capasso for his patience, support, and lending a listening ear. The intern wishes to thank his wife, Jennifer, a thousand times over for her support, patience, input, understanding, and love through the numerous midnight oil sessions. Most importantly, the intern graciously thanks Baby Camryn, whose smiles made it all worth it and washed away the frustrations.
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Chapter One

Introduction

Within any school system there exists a feeling of isolation among teachers. Teachers are not given ample time to generate professional discussions among themselves. Teacher talk about current educational practices and programs is something that is rarely witnessed. Teacher preparation times are often spent in lesson preparation, marking papers, running copies, and countless other teaching duties of managing the classroom. For the most part, these activities are done alone. The isolation that teachers feel is often what causes some to leave the profession and still others to become stagnant, lost in the only methods they can master alone (Morgan 1997). This study focuses on removing the isolation of teaching and developing teacher collaboration.

For schools and teachers to promote change and have a positive impact on morale among teachers, professional talk must be provided. Giving teachers specific time for discussion and observation of other teachers can yield inspiration and change. Removing the mystery of other classrooms, methods, and current research can bring substantial results to any district. Providing a model for teacher collaboration will enable the school to improve the learning and teaching environment.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the effects of teacher communication and collaboration on teacher confidence and morale due to the implementation of a program in which teachers collaborate with each other to discuss new and different
programs based on professional meetings, newsletters, or literature. Teachers will be exposed to *teacher talk meetings*, *professional literature*, and *newsletters* to gain new ideas and confidence about teaching. Professional talk sessions will be held weekly. The study will result in a determination of the effects of increased communication and collaboration among teachers. Through the implementation of teacher talk sessions and teacher literature the intern intends to accomplish a starting point for change and collaboration by and between teachers. The study will also show the relationship between feelings of isolation in teaching and its impact on teacher competence and change. By completing this study, the intern will be able to make a recommendation to the administration and board of education concerning the impact of the program.

**Definitions**

The title of this study is Active Collaborative Teaching (ACT). Exclusive to the study is the implementation of teacher meeting times, professional literature, as well as a weekly newsletter.

The terms *teacher talk* and *professional talk* are interchangeable and refer to the weekly teacher meeting times. Weekly teacher meeting times entitled “Teacher Talk” are held to discuss current methodology in teaching, changes in education, and any personal educational topics of interest. The starting point of the meetings is the brochure the Master Teacher which can also be referred to as the *professional literature*. This serves as a quick informational beginning. Other topics that may be included are informational articles from Education Week. Curriculum information is also included in each meeting.
A weekly newsletter entitled *Friday Focus* serves as a follow up to the weekly meetings as well as discussing current happenings in classrooms. The newsletter serves a catalyst to generate interest in what teachers are doing in their classrooms. Humor is also infused to keep the subjects discussed light and a pleasure to read. This allows teachers to gain information about different types of classroom management, different teaching styles, a variety of content delivery methods, and a chance to witness what others are doing within the school.

Another important component to understanding the study is the concept of collaboration. Simply put, *collaboration* is teachers and administrators, and sometimes students, talking about education, learning, and teaching.

**Limitations of the Study**

Since this study will focus on current teaching collaboration solely within the intern’s school system, results will vary from school system to school system. Collaboration after the program has been implemented, as well as the effect on teaching methods the results will vary from school to school based on different communication models already in place. This data will be analyzed to determine the effects of the teaching collaboration programs. From this comparison of surveys, a conclusion and recommendation will be made to the administration and board of education indicating continuance of the programs.
Setting of the Study

Downe Township is a rural community located on the Delaware Bay in the southern tip of Cumberland County. Almost half of Downe's 35,712 acres is marshland, and more than 11,500 of these acres is owned outright by the State of New Jersey. Moreover the state maintains control over much of the rest of the township through the Coastal Area Facilities Review Act and Wetlands and Freshwater Wetlands Acts regulations. Currently over 85% of the township remains undeveloped, and is either woodland or wetland giving rise to the lowest population density in the county (33 persons per square mile). The township is geographically isolated. Within Downe's borders there are three small communities. Fortescue, a fishing resort on the bay and weakfish capital of the world, has a seasonal tourist/sports fisherman economy; Dividing Creek and Newport have limited commercial activity, primarily consisting of service stations and small grocery stores. Industrial development is minimal. What exists centers around natural resources, and involves agriculture and sand mining. According to the Regional Labor Market Review, the unemployment rate in Downe Township is 9.8%. In addition, income levels in general are low, with almost 16% of the population below the poverty level. As an additional level of economic hardship, in Downe 58% of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. All of these factors combined create very little revenue for the school system.

There are two school buildings within Downe Township that provide pre-school through eighth grade education for the district's children. For their secondary education, township students are bussed to nearby Bridgeton High School, in the city of Bridgeton.
Within the township, one classroom per grade has been the rule. In addition to the pre-school through eighth grade program, Downe Township is a receiving district for special education students from both Cumberland and Salem County. Programs offered are pre-school disabilities, Moderate Cognitive Disabilities, Mild Cognitive Disabilities, Behavioral Disabilities, and Learning Disabilities. Most of the special education students come from other rural districts where similar social and economic conditions prevail.

**Significance of the Study**

If schools want students to improve, teachers must be given the opportunity to observe and communicate with one another to gain ideas and improve upon teaching methods. Rather than working in isolation and not receiving fresh ideas, teachers need the opportunity to have discussion times to communicate about teaching and have access to professional literature. By allowing teachers time to visit other classrooms and/or discuss things they have seen, new ideas and improvements can be brought to the classroom. Teachers having difficulty or who just want a new idea about a particular or new subject area can visit another teacher or bring it to the table in professional talk sessions and learn new information. This in turn will impact the classroom as teachers discuss different methods and ideas and bring them back to the classroom.

Teachers begin to share responsibilities related to instructional delivery, can design more creative lessons and solutions, develop a firmer understanding of student needs, increase opportunities for student success, and generate a greater sense of ownership within the structure of the school. In the Michigan Inclusive Education Project, 1991-
1993, these benefits were substantiated. Through this study by Rainforth, it was found that collaborative teaching was met with great approval and levels of success (1997).

This study should be conducted to reap the benefits of collaboration by and between teachers. As educational standards continue to increase along with the demand of the educational profession, no longer can teachers reach students on their own. Every facet of teaching and pedagogy must be shared. The implementation of effective teacher collaboration programs should bring equalization and success to the classroom playing field.

**Organization of the Study**

The organization of this study will focus on the following areas and topics. Chapter Two will explore the current research surrounding the concepts of collaborative teaching and its impact on the profession. In Chapter Three the parameters of the study will be introduced and explained. Chapter Four will present the findings of the field research studies. The conclusions, implications, and further areas of study will be presented in Chapter Five.
Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

Collaborative teaching is an approach to educational delivery used to empower
teachers and help students. In simplest terms, collaboration is teachers talking about
teaching. It is a center born of mutual concern for students, a shared search for better
strategies and solutions, a wise willingness to wonder and wait (DiPardo 1996). It meets
teachers’ basic needs to be treated as professionals, to have opportunities to grow in a
non-threatening environment, to feel comfortable with change, and to experience
camaraderie (Sahakian 1996). It serves as a vehicle for empowering teachers to monitor
student learning and adjust teaching practices to ensure student success. Teachers who
are a part of the collaborative process enjoy increased autonomy, collegiality, and efficacy
(Williamson 1996, Gable 1997).

In the research there are four areas of collaboration. They are integration,
interaction, active learning, and faculty autonomy. Integration is teachers sharing ideas,
perspectives, and knowledge of the discipline to enhance student learning. Interaction is
communication among both teachers and students in the teaching and learning process.
Active learning is the amount of student engagement in the learning process. Faculty
autonomy is the independence or interdependence among teachers in the teaching and
learning process (McDaniel 1997).
The four dimensions of collaboration listed above can be interchanged and meshed together. The goal of collaboration is to be able to communicate with other teachers and improve education, methods of teaching, and to grow as a professional (Sahakian 1996). Collaboration among teachers opens the door for self-improvement and opens dialogue about pedagogical approaches. When participating in collaborative activities, faculty members move away from their individual disciplines to a broader view of their discipline and where it fits into the larger context of knowledge. Collaboration sets the stage for the integration of thinking and ideas. Teachers no longer need to depend solely among themselves to reach their students. No longer can a teacher in a classroom of diverse learners meet all the educational, social, and emotional needs of students. It takes collaboration among all professionals in a school system to educate all students (Duchardt 1999). Through the collaborative process, isolation among teachers is absolved. The school organization that provides and encourages interaction among teachers will increase teacher efficacy, produce a greater sense of community and commitment to students, reduce teacher isolation, and provide a greater sense of the teacher’s ability to affect student learning (Morrison 1994, Williamson 1996). Faculty in collaborative teaching arrangements typically integrate material from various fields of knowledge into a new, single, intellectually coherent entity (McDaniel 1997).

Traditional modes of teaching tend not to facilitate mutual support or encouragement. Some faculty members can expect never to be visited by a colleague or to engage in sustained conversations about one’s discipline or teaching except with an office
mate or close friend. Large meetings often address only agenda topics, which do not address individual needs. Neither the chance conversation nor the large forum lends itself to the thoughtful exploration of different approaches and points of view, and the victim is too often the teacher. Collaborative teachers offer each other a much needed sounding board for sharing the excitements as well as the perplexities and disappointments of class sessions. They also develop the chance to engage in more philosophical explorations about teaching. Collaborative pedagogy holds much promise, but only if teachers themselves can learn to become better collaborators. Both classroom research and the literature on learning indicate that students learn from the behavior educators model. If collaboration is preached, yet teachers practice in isolation, or team teach with inadequate preparation, students get a confused message. Through learning to "walk the talk," educators can reap the double advantage of improving our teaching as well as students' learning. At the same time, teachers will contribute to the rebuilding of a sense of community in education (Bleich 1995, Robinson 1995).

Collaborative practice is essential for excellent teaching and learning in classrooms. Faculty collaboration, within and across disciplines, enriches and improves the quality of teaching and learning (McDaniel 1997). The current emphasis on teacher empowerment to affect change relies heavily on the collaborative process. Teachers working together to exchange mutual help is the focus of collaboration (Devlin-Scherer 1997). This mutual help can affect both the quantity and quality of work. In terms of quantity, the articulation efforts of partners enables all to accomplish more as a group than any one person could
accomplish alone. The quality comes from the product of discussing one’s work, making it a group effort, less lonely, and more meaningful than if the same work were to be done alone. Teaching is such work that it requires collaboration if it is to be done well (Erickson 1989).

The benefits of teachers collaborating are numerous. Teachers can learn new strategies that are working for others. In addition, they can witness effective teaching. Most importantly, ideas begin to be shared. An active support system is created in which teachers no longer reach frustration because they have run out of ideas and approaches (Robinson 1995, Reys 1997). More specifically, teachers share responsibilities related to instructional delivery, can design more creative lessons and solutions, develop a firmer understanding of student needs, increase opportunities for student success, and generate a greater sense of ownership within the structure of school. In the Michigan Inclusive Education Project, 1991-1993, these benefits were substantiated. Through this study by Rainforth, it was found that fears were dismissed and collaborative teaching was met with applause. Many teachers feel that collaboration has helped them become better teachers for all their students, and they would prefer to leave teaching than return to their former isolation (1997).

While the benefits are numerous, there is a downside. In order for collaboration to occur, teachers must be willing to share ideas and invite colleagues into their classroom. Collaboration involves making visible one’s own work to fellow workers (Erickson 1989).
Many have fears about others observing or learning their trade secrets. This fear must be addressed by developing trust. To do this, teachers must be aware that the divine purpose is to help students and themselves. Trust among colleagues is crucial. One study in a school found this to be an essential element. Teachers working together in the study at the "Self-Directed Learning Center" found the trust issue the hardest aspect to overcome (Dipardo 1996). Collaborative change is based on a few deceptively simple principles: open communication, trust, and respect. Communication must be open to be shared; all must participate and express their perspectives. Trust and respect are necessary to assume that all have important perspectives to offer, all have the capacity to lead, and all should be heard. It is through true communication of perceptions based on equal power that all the strengths of an organization are brought to bear on creative problem-solving and the effective change that results. Collaboration requires an evolution in educators' thinking and behaving (O'Conner 1999, Wood 1998).

Time and cost are also issues. Teachers must be willing to part with their personal preparation time to visit another teacher or the district must be willing to provide coverage while a teacher is out of the classroom visiting. The key is to understand the need to break the traditional mold of individualism and isolation that has characterized teaching. The barriers to collaboration among those who have knowledge and expertise about student learning can be overcome. The key is to develop relationships as partners in teaching by improving collaboration skills and maintaining students as the focus of collaborative efforts (Bondy 1997).
Once administrators, teachers, and boards of education understand collaboration is for the good of the group, the idea and programs are readily accepted. In an interview with Tom McGreal on teacher evaluation, he stated this type of plan has been enacted in over 150 schools. Positive results and feedback have been heard as morale has been raised and some pressure has been alleviated from administrators (Brandt 1996). With acceptance and support, willing teachers begin to actively visit and observe each other to gain ideas and methods. Teachers start dialoging and supporting each other. Conversations about all aspects of teaching are discussed. Teachers take an active role in their growth as professionals. This was the case in a school district in Virginia. Both administration and staff found that they could develop a growth plan based on simple collaboration with staff members (Sahakian 1996, Edwards 1995).

The benefits of active collaborative teaching (ACT) emerge. A sense of collegiality and support comes forth. Morale among staff increases as teachers no longer face the isolation of teaching alone. Empirical literature suggests that isolated teachers are less successful than their collaborative counterparts. Isolated teachers are often narrowly conservative in their pedagogic thinking and approaches. Enhanced opportunities for collegial collaboration ease anxieties and keep some of the best veteran teachers in the classroom (DiPardo 1996). The focus on professional growth and student achievement occurs as teachers of all abilities and backgrounds are contributing to the improvement of the educational environment and learning community (Bassett 1996).
Teacher collaboration has been generally applauded for its potential in improving the working lives of teachers. Collaboration can reduce teacher uncertainty. Teacher teaming can reduce isolation and enhance teachers’ professional self-image; collaboration promotes collegiality and school learning. It contributes to risk-taking and diminishes the fragmentation of teachers’ experience. Through collaboration, staff members can turn what is somewhat private and mysterious -- teaching -- into a problem-solving opportunity. Through their collaboration, staff members can open their own practices to scrutiny, offering the possibility of growth. Through collaboration, staff members can move toward a willingness to reexamine some of the givens of traditional American education in a spirit that offers the promise of productive change. The persistence of privacy and teaching with the door shut, is challenged in this working together. Such collaboration promises positive change for education (Kain 1996).

The presentation of this literature along with data compiled about current staff morale will give the administration of the district positive direction for school growth. No longer can teachers work in isolation and expect to achieve the standards set by the state. The sharing of ideas, methodologies, theories, and pedagogical practice are essential for teacher survival. The Active Collaborative Teaching plan will enable teachers in my district to grow and blossom as professionals. Collaboration has considerable potential as a vehicle for teacher enhancement and systemic reform. There is a need for multiple ways
to stimulate and provoke teachers to talk with their colleagues about what they are doing and thinking (Reys 1997).
Chapter Three
Research Design

The research design for the collaborative teaching program was developed using a questioning/interview/survey process. Because the research study had three components, and may have been integrative for certain interviewees, there are several interview questions. The questions were built upon one another and were interrelated.

The research instruments used in this study concentrated on interviewing questions that were related to the three components of the active collaborative teaching program (Friday Focus, Master Teacher, Teacher Talk meetings). Subjects that were interviewed were questioned about their involvement in the different components and asked to reflect upon the impact of the program professionally and/or personally.

The sample population used in this research involved the staff from both the primary and elementary schools. All staff members (central office staff, maintenance, support staff, and teachers) were exposed to the program. It was therefore appropriate to interview all staff members to gain complete understanding of the impact of the collaboration program.

The sampling techniques used were primarily individual interview formats. Staff members were interviewed and/or surveyed using the same questions. Because the
questions built upon each other, some of the questions were not applicable and therefore
did not need to be asked. During the interview, the intern documented all responses on the
interview sheets.

Once the interviews were completed, the data was compiled and summarized
according to responses to determine if any causal relationships developed as a result of the
collaborative program. Patterns related to teacher comfort levels, job performance, or
morale were also analyzed to determine any impact the program had on the staff.
Relationships between the questions and responses such as professional growth were
sought out. The interviews were used to determine which aspects of the collaborative
process were most effective in promoting staff members talking about the teaching
process, students, and learning.

Once interviews were completed, the responses were recorded and tallied. The
information was sorted into the three components. The three different components were
then analyzed to determine which component had the greatest impact on the collaborative
process. The data from the interviews was sorted again into total non-participants, those
who participated in one program, those who participated in two programs, and those who
were participants in all three programs. This data was analyzed to determine if
participating in one or more programs had a significant impact on collaboration. Non-
participant data interview sheets were also analyzed to determine what population of the
sample was not being reached through collaboration.
Through the analysis of the data there was a determination about the effectiveness of collaboration among groups of people. The impact of collaboration on the teaching and learning process was also a significant factor in the program equation. The study also provided insight into what types of collaboration work among teaching and support staff. The data produced evidence of the effectiveness of collaborative programs so that further collaborative projects can be developed and implemented in the future.
Chapter Four

Presentation of the Research Findings

Data for the Active Collaborative Teaching program was gathered through an interview/survey process. Staff members from all disciplines were invited and encouraged to participate. Data was collected, gathered, analyzed, and tallied on 29 subjects.

Upon collection of the data, responses were tallied according to the different components of the program. Data was then sorted into the following categories, Friday Focus, Master Teacher, or Teacher Talk. An analysis of each component of the collaboration process was conducted to determine if participants collaborated (talked) about the Friday Focus or the Master Teacher. Data was further analyzed to determine if the participants found each of the collaborative programs (Friday Focus, Master Teacher, Teacher Talk) to be of professional value.

The Friday Focus yielded the following results. Of the 29 participants in the interview/survey, 22 respondents read the Friday Focus. Of the 22 respondents, 12 collaborated with other staff members on its content. Eighteen of the 22 participants found the Friday Focus to be of professional value. Statistically, this would indicate that 75.8% of the respondents read the material, 54.5% of those who read the focus collaborated on the topics, and 81.8% of the sample who read found the Friday Focus to be professionally valuable.
The second component of the collaborative program, the Master Teacher brochure, found 25 of the 29 participants reading the material. Of the 25 persons who read the Master Teacher, 15 respondents collaborated with others on the content. Twenty-two of the 25 readers found the material to be of professional value. 86.2% of the sample population read the material. Of the respondents who read the material, 60% collaborated on the topics. Professional value was found among 88% of the participants.

Teacher Talk sessions yielded eight participants out of the sample of 29 respondents. Of the eight persons who participated, all found the teacher talk sessions to be professionally valuable. The eight persons were fully collaborating during the sessions. Statistically, this program only impacted 27.5% of the sample population, however its value collaboratively and professionally was 100% according to the respondents.

Further analysis of the collaborative Friday Focus program indicated areas of professional value that included the following topics: curriculum, communication, leadership, instruction, and performance.

Under the umbrella of curriculum, participants indicated that the Friday Focus addressed how others are addressing curriculum issues, and ideas for future lessons. In the area of communication, respondents indicated that staff questions were answered and that they were given insights into the happenings of other classrooms. Staff members
found that they gained insight into the values of the administration, helping to more clearly understand the leadership and also presented them with varied thinking on topics presented. Instruction was addressed through the mention of educationally sound practices, validation of teaching beliefs, and preferred teaching styles. Staff performance was increased by looking for the positive and giving positive feedback, providing clearer expectations of staff members and the motivation to present excellent lessons, and comic relief through humor and laughter.

Explorations into the data gathered as to the professional value of the Master Teacher indicated worth in the areas of communication, group processes, instruction, professional development, and performance. Communication comments included the elimination of excess talk and distractions, and that it provided very simple and direct methods for handling problems. Group processes were addressed through tips on conducting meetings and how to deal with people, including time wasters. Instructional comments included ideas for future lessons, the reinforcement of good teaching practices, reflection upon self teaching skills, commonality of problems in teaching, informative and useful ideas for the classroom. Participants commented on the professional development aspect of the Master Teacher in its providing of different strategies, different perspectives, reflection and reassessment of classroom practices, and reminders about the profession. Respondents discussed performance through the focus on the positive, redirection when feeling overwhelmed, and reinforcement of widely held teacher-beliefs.
The Teacher Talk program’s professional value was in the areas of communication, leadership, group processes, curriculum, instruction, and performance. Under communication and group processes, participants were able to talk about the profession and use each other as a sounding board to gain ideas and find reinforcement about their own values. The sessions cleared uncertainty around issues and focused group members on adult topics instead of constant student issues. Brainstorming and problem-solving brought insight into the group sessions. Having an administrator present provided information about school leadership direction and expectations for staff members. Many questions concerning the leadership were able to be aired in a comfortable, open, non-threatening environment. Curriculum and instruction areas were met through group brainstorming sessions to generate new lesson ideas or ideas that were working for other teachers. Many different curricular/instructional delivery systems were discussed. The participants in the teacher talk group felt the time helped their performance as they were able to reflect and discuss their experiences with an open forum group of professionals with a common tie to the teaching profession.

The data was further analyzed to determine if collaboration increased with the more programs interviewees were having involvement. Of the 29 participants, three were involved in no programs and therefore no collaboration. Five respondents were involved in one program (reading of the Friday Focus or Master Teacher). Of the five, three participated in some form of collaboration. Statistically, this would equate to 60% of the
participants involved in one program collaborated with others. Thirteen of the interviewees were involved in two of the collaboration programs (both the Friday Focus and the Master Teacher). Of these thirteen participants, seven participated in collaborative talk, equivalent to 53.8% of the sample population. Eight members of the sample population interviewed participated in all three components of the active collaborative teaching program. All eight members were collaborators, indicating 100% collaboration for those involved in three programs.

The 29 members of the sample population were further studied to determine which groups of people were more likely to collaborate and which segment of the population was not affected by any means of collaboration. The surveys were place into one of the following categories: support staff, instructional aides, central office staff, and teaching staff.

The one support staff member participating in the sample study did not participate in any form of collaboration. Among the instructional aides, six members participated in the surveys. Four of the respondents collaborated with other instructional aides and/or teachers. This indicated a 67% participation in collaboration. Four of the five central office respondents participated in one or more components of the collaborative programs, showing an 80% rate of collaboration. The largest portion of the sample population, the teaching staff, included 17 participants. Of the 17 respondents, 12 members of the sample population participated in some form of collaboration. This rate of collaboration equated to 70.5%.
Chapter Five
Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study

Careful analysis of the data clearly showed that the collaborative programs had a significant impact on the staff professionally. The programs reached the goal of promoting increased collaboration by and between members of the school staff. With the three programs in place, increased professional talk occurred among the staff.

The Master Teacher component yielded the highest amounts of professional worth and collaboration. The brochure was brief and spoke to the many issues facing educators today. This brief, yet informative pamphlet provided the right amount of reading material on the right topics. This type of program to promote collaboration among staff members was the easiest and most successful. It can be concluded that material that is a quick and easy read yet to the point and focused on providing helpful professional strategies can promote collaboration and raise levels of professionalism.

The Master Teacher is a valuable tool that can be used among all school staff to promote self-reflection and give reminders about basic concepts in teaching or dealing with people that we may have once learned, but have forgotten. It is an inexpensive tool that can provide in-service, tips for teaching, and professional behaviors. When paired with a discussion group, it can take the brochure to the next level of self-reflection and collaboration among teachers.
The Friday Focus did not have the high yielding results of the Master Teacher. However, its levels of collaboration and professional worth were close to the levels the Master Teacher produced. This is surprising due to the fact that the Friday Focus was briefer than the Master Teacher brochure. Comments surrounding the Friday Focus though gave teachers a view of other classrooms and practices and allowed the staff to become informed about the expectations of the administration. Some teachers even strived to be mentioned in the weekly newsletter.

While the Friday Focus did not reach the same levels of professional worth and collaboration, its worth should not be ignored. There were significant amounts of collaboration that occurred that were of higher quality levels. The depth that it reached among the staff had a more widespread effect on communications and expectations.

The Teacher Talk sessions reached the smallest amount of the population. Very few of the teaching staff participated in this collaborative effort. However, among those that did, this group yielded the highest amounts of both collaboration and professionalism. Although a small amount of people were involved, this collaborative program had the greatest level of quality discussions to improve the profession. In this group, teachers were reflective and gained valuable professional ideas from each other.
Groups of reflective teaching practitioners is what any school is striving to achieve. Administrators want teachers to be talking about teaching. Holding specific times and meetings in order to collaborate can promote teachers talking about teaching. Building time into the school day in order to collaborate may be what is necessary to improve the current status quo in teaching.

If administrators want teachers to become reflective and actually talk about the profession, they must be the model for collaboration. Administrators need to make the time to allow for collaboration, but also show teachers their involvement and professional talk levels.

As a major collaborator in this project, the intern found significant worth in promoting collaboration. The Master Teacher component reminded the intern of important concepts in teaching and allowed for self-reflection. The Friday Focus was an extremely valuable component as well. This allowed the intern to focus on positive school functions and teaching practices. It was written at a level that caused people to pause and think about their own classroom and professional practices. The most rewarding component of the collaborative programs was the Teacher Talk sessions. Here, the intern had the opportunity to model what collaboration can and should be. Teachers were talking about teaching. The meetings always remained focused and positive. The group always had the Master Teacher as a starting point, however any topic on any subject was always permitted to be addressed.
As a leader, the intern found the worth collaboration can have on an organization. The intern recognized that teachers can help one another by talking through issues at a professional level. As a leader, the intern recognized that time to collaborate should be provided as it helps teachers to overcome isolation and address issues from a non-negative standpoint. The intern understands that administration should be involved in every aspect of promoting collaborative talk by being a model for professional talk and allowing the staff the opportunities to collaborate.

As a result of this study, there was an impact on the staff to start talking about the profession. The staff also became more reflective about their own practices. Most significantly, teachers started their own collaborative group. Different teachers hosted different meetings at different locations throughout the school. The group still used the Master Teacher as a starting point, but they were also reporting on professional reading that they have researched. This is the most rewarding aspect of the study, that the programs had the significant impact to cause teachers to realize the worth of collaboration and start their own collaborative groups.

Further study is necessary to explore how to reach more members of the staff. The intern had hoped that all members of the staff would participate, but found that support staff was not reached or represented in the sample population.
Additional studies should be conducted to determine if the collaborative programs have an impact on morale or feelings about the profession. There may be the opportunity to explore the long term effects of collaboration on the overall morale of an organization.

Different models of collaboration should be explored to determine if there are more efficient methods to promote teachers talking about the profession. The intern would like to explore different scheduling options to provide teachers and staff with professional talk time.

Further studies should be explored to promote collaboration and put it into practice in our schools. The professional worth of collaboration on the teaching profession cannot be ignored. The isolation that teachers feel has been what has driven many novice teachers from the profession and kept others from improving their own teaching practices. If administrators and teachers want to improve the profession, no longer can we close the doors to our offices and classrooms. We must reach out and talk to one another to reflect, improve, and share all aspects of the profession. No longer can teaching be a closed door profession.
References


Appendix A

Research Instrument
Active Collaborative Teaching

Interview Sheet

1. What is your role in the school system?

2. Did you read the Friday Focus? If so, did you discuss it with anyone?

3. Did you find it professionally valuable? If so, how?

4. Did you read the Master Teacher? If so, did you discuss it with anyone?

5. Did you find it professionally valuable? If so, how?

6. Were you a participant of Teacher Talk?

7. If you were, did you find the meetings to be of professional value?

8. How did the meetings help you professionally?
Appendix B

Friday Focus Newsletters
Friday Focus

Dear Staff,

Thank you so much for your efforts in starting off this year so positively. Your hard work and dedication to our students has already shown with smooth day to day operations and many exciting learning projects.

I enjoyed visiting Mrs. Noseda’s class where students are experiencing authorship. Mrs. Mounts’ students were observed doing a shared writing project using descriptive writing with a puzzling technique. It’s great to see students excited about writing!

Beginning Tuesday, September 14, at 3:30p.m., I will be holding voluntary “Teacher Talk” sessions in the library. The focus of the meetings will be to talk about current educational trends, successes in the classroom, and any other topics of interest. Our starting point will involve discussions using the Master Teacher. All staff are welcome to attend.

Enjoy the school year,

Todd

"The child is endowed with unknown powers which can guide us to a radiant future. If what we really want is a new world, then education must take as its aim the development of these hidden possibilities.” - Maria Montessori

Thought for the week - Being the keeper of the watch is a huge responsibility--and an awesome opportunity.
Friday Focus

Dear Staff,

Thanks once again for such a great beginning to the school year!

This week I had the opportunity to witness a phonic/reading lesson with "movement." Students in Mrs. Thompson’s class were reviewing phonetic sounds. During the applied reading portion of the lesson, students followed rules for capitalization and punctuation with body motions (a system adapted by Mrs. Thompson). Quite often, students ignore punctuation and capitalization. By emphasizing the commas, periods, quotation marks, etc., with movement students are more cognizant of this component of reading that is often forgotten.

Thank you to those who attended our first “Teacher Talk” session. We talked about many different things and ideas were generated for increased parent participation and a teacher visitation program. The group also decided that we would alternate the times and locations of our meetings. The next meeting will be at the primary school at 8:15 a.m. on September 21st. The following week we will be meeting at the elementary school at 3:30 p.m. on September 28th. This alternating schedule will be followed for the remainder of the school year.

Todd

First Grade Teacher: One who knows how to make little things count!

My Daily Lesson Plan: Today I will “plant” what is relevant, sustaining, enriching and true.

Thought for the week: It’s wise not to make a rule that cannot be enforced.
Friday Focus

Dear Staff,

Many thanks for a smooth and informational Back to School Night. It is
great to hear nothing but positive comments from our community and parents. Keep up
the excellent work! And regarding that evening, Mrs. Gandy and Mrs. Mounts
tied for the award for keeping parents captivated the longest amount of time! More
seriously, I truly enjoyed peeking into the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade core team rooms. I
witnessed pods of parents speaking with individual teachers. This truly showed the
special individual touch that we give to our students. Many more thanks to the teachers
that supported and joined our PTA (Mrs. Quinn).

The second “Teacher Talk” session was enjoyable. We discussed student
discipline, and specifically focused on the issue of “sticky fingers” and techniques for
solving this type of problem. Our next meeting will be Tuesday, September 28th,
3:40 p.m. at the Elementary School Library. Our topics of discussion will include
student motivation and writing.

Todd

Stress is: You’ve been informed that a pet snake is lost in your classroom (Peggy)!

My Daily Lesson Plan: Today I will remember to compliment, encourage, and monitor the
progress of others.

Thought for the week: The difference between adults’ and children’s motivation to learn
confirms our importance to student learning.
Friday Focus

Dear Staff,

Yet another glorious week of teaching and learning! You have all been doing an outstanding job of reaching your students. While visiting Mrs. McCann's class this week, I observed students working on story maps (great use of graphic organizers to emphasize reading comprehension) and did not realize that Ms. Cinghina was in the room working with students also. This was great! For in-class instruction/inclusion to work, instruction must become integrated. To walk into a classroom, and not realize that two teachers were working together to instruct students shows that communication, support, and collaboration by and between teachers can truly help our students to succeed.

This week at "Teacher Talk" we discussed student motivation and learning. We mulled over techniques for "reaching" our students. It is often very difficult to reach our students when we are competing with such things as television, video games, computers, and Pokemon! Our next meeting will be Tuesday, October 5th, 8:15 a.m. at the Primary School. Our topics of discussion will include "What's in a name?" and the reading/writing connection.

Todd

Troublemakers come and go, but their names stick with you forever.

My Daily Lesson Plan: Today I will remember the power of example and try to be the best example I know how to be for others.

Thought for the week: It's hard to convince people they're important if we can't remember their names.
Dear Staff,

Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork, paperwork, paperwork, paperwork. I've still not made my point, paperwork, paperwork, paperwork, paperwork.

All of us are experiencing that frustration at one point or another. The endless amounts of documentation that come with the “profession” can begin to boggle your mind, dampen your spirits, and crush your enthusiasm. But still, we press on, for there is joy in educating a child. When your desk has become an advertisement for saving trees, one must remember the children. When we are at an all time low from the newest state directives, remember the children. We are there for the children, and from this, remember to find hope and aspirations that we can make a difference in the life of a child.

This week at “Teacher Talk” we discussed how those “names” can really stick with you for quite a long time! We also talked about writing and what’s happening in our individual classrooms as far as reading and writing experiences. Our next meeting will be Tuesday, October 12th, 3:40 p.m. at the Elementary School. Our topics of discussion will include student responsibility.

Have a lovely weekend,

Todd

What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters, compared to what lies within us – Emerson

Thought for the week: Learning ways to respond is the first step in becoming responsible.
Friday Focus

Dear Staff,

Integration and inclusion, but at the same time, standards for all. It is extremely difficult to maintain this balance in the classroom. All the more reason to begin to rely on each other more. As a staff, it is important to realize the strengths that each of us has, and utilize those strengths. To reach the core curriculum standards and implement state directives for inclusion, we must reach out to each other and use the abilities that we possess as a staff.

Mrs. Zimmerman and Mrs. Miller have truly harnessed the possibilities of working together. On every visit, every stop in, every observation, these two individuals are always working with students, separately and together. They have found the balance and planning power to affect the most students in the shortest amount of time.

In Mrs. Finley’s room, Mrs. Blizzard has been observed taking the “teachable moment” and harnessing Mrs. Finley’s direction for classroom observation. Mrs. Noseda and Miss Guyon and Mrs. Meger have been working together to bring success to all first graders one student at a time.

Continue to collaborate, plan, and facilitate activities to reach the most students, the best possible way!

Enjoy your weekend,

Todd

Our life is what our thoughts make it.....
- Marcus Aurelius

Thought for the week: Good teaching is arousing, persuading, and convincing. Using gestures while we teach can assist all three attributes.

Teacher Talk - Tuesday, October 19, 8:20 a.m., Primary School
Friday Focus

Dear Staff,

Some "teacherisms" for your enjoyment!

"I'm being evaluated?! I thought it was a casual day!

Punishment is having to use the student restroom.

No matter how many times you announce the page number, someone will ask again.

If you rush to the store in your worst outfit, you'll always run into a student!

Enjoy your weekend,

Todd

As important as 'hanging on' is knowing when to 'let go.'

My Daily Lesson Plan: Today I will realize my personal and professional limits.

Thought for the week: The person who wants perks before he or she has earned them will seldom earn them.

Teacher Talk - Tuesday, October 26, 3:30 p.m., Elementary School
Dear Staff,

As more and more is put upon us with the achievement of state standards, remember one simple word: integrate.

Learning to incorporate one subject into another is often difficult and takes a great amount of planning, but can allow more time to be spent on multiple subjects. It is a personal journey, but it is also one of the easiest ways to attain multiple standards.

Mrs. Finley’s class is an example of ultimate integration. Almost all of you were able to witness this today. Since approximately October 8 the students have been working on their presentations. Think about the multiple subjects that students experienced through this project: history, performing arts, speaking, reading, and writing to name a few.

Now let’s look at the Core Curriculum Standards: Visual and Performing Arts Standard 1.2 All students will refine perceptual, intellectual, physical, and technical skills through theater, Language Arts Literacy Standards 3.1 All students will speak for a variety of real purposes and audiences, 3.2 All students will listen actively, in a variety of situations, to information from a variety of sources, 3.3 All students will write in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes, 3.4 All students will read various materials and texts with comprehension and critical analysis, Mathematics Standard 4.6 All students will develop number sense and an ability to represent numbers in a variety of forms and use numbers in diverse situations, Science Standard 5.3 All students will
develop an understanding of how people of various cultures have contributed to the advancement of science and technology, and how major discoveries and events have advanced science and technology. Social Studies Standards 6.3 All students will acquire historical understanding of political and diplomatic ideas, forces and institutions throughout the history of New Jersey, the United States, and the world. 6.5 All students will acquire historical understanding of varying cultures throughout the history of New Jersey, the United States, and the world.

And, there are many other standards not mentioned here that were addressed. When you integrate, plan, and execute multi-subject lessons, the standards are reachable and attainable. And, what will the students remember, that they had fun learning. It’s okay to have alternative forms of assessment and not always be concerned with the text, the papers, or the tests.

Have a wonderful Halloween weekend,
Todd

Education today, more than ever before, must see clearly the dual objectives: education for living and educating for making a living. - James Mason Wood

My Daily Lesson Plan: Today I will be conscious of the greater scheme of things and relative importance of my contribution to it.

Thought for the week: Even our very best students can reach higher heights.

Teacher Talk - I will announce the next Teacher Talk session shortly, but please continue to talk together about learning.
Friday Focus

Dear Staff,

I apologize for the long hiatus! When I started the Friday Focus, I made a promise to myself that I would uphold the purpose of this publication, FOCUS on what is good, positive, and educationally worthy. I lost my focus for the past few weeks, allowing myself to become wrapped up in the various “distractions” that accompany the job.

As the school year progresses, each of us will become busier and still busier, so please remember to help each other FOCUS. We need to remember to work together as a team. Our collaboration can become our greatest strength as we strive to help our students to achieve. It is very important that we continue to support one another in our every endeavor if we are to truly reach success as a school team.

“Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.” - Henry Ford

Today I will encourage teamwork with others and be a productive team member myself.

Todd

This issue is two fold, focusing on supporting one another and two other important areas for team building; listening and trust. It is always important to listen to one another, but what we do with that information is even more important.

Thoughts for the week: Those who listen the most are often more influential than those who talk the most.

The only way to be trusted is to be trustworthy.

Teacher Talk - Tuesday, December 7th, 3:30 at the Elementary School
Dear Staff,

Enjoy reading the two issues of the Master Teacher. I don't even want to talk about the delivery of bad news. This is a tough area for almost every one of us. However, the reading topic deserves special attention.

While making one of my many classroom visits this week, I saw two teachers doing an excellent lesson on reading. On Monday Mrs. McCann and Ms. Cinghina were preparing students to read a story about archaeology. The following critical aspects to teaching reading were observed: building background, setting purpose for reading, and creating reader interest. The two teachers did this by having two groups participate in a real archaeological dig. (See the teachers to collaborate on how this was accomplished)

The above mentioned teaching strategies for teaching reading are crucial to the comprehension process. Students need the necessary background information in order to understand what they are reading about. Providing background is especially important due to the limited nature of exposure many of our students have surrounding the world in general.

Teaching these skills in reading is called providing schema or foundational knowledge. Another term that is also read in the literature related to schema is scaffolding. We need to provide our students with the necessary supports so that they can understand what they are reading about. Just imagine, would you understand a story about a zoo if never in your life you had been to one or even seen one in a book? For further information on this topic, see me or consult the following authors: Routman, Calkins, Graves, Irwin, Wepner.

Have a great weekend,

Todd

Thought for the week: We always unlock more doors when we teach students to read.

Teacher Talk - Tuesday, January 11th, 8:20 at the Primary School
Friday Focus

Dear Staff,

Two issues yet again! Finding the funny is very important to every aspect throughout our school. We almost need the humor and laughter to survive. Many thanks go to Mrs. Mathis for keeping this in perspective for me. I often take everything very seriously and to heart, but just when I’m becoming to serious, she finds a way to make me smile or belly laugh. As I visit with many of you, there often seems to be quite a few of us that know how to find the funny in it all and help us all to get through the everyday stresses, confusion, and changes. Find the funny faster is dedicated to those staff members that help us to smile and not take life to seriously. Thank you!

In the second issue this week, we are reminded that the profession of teaching (everyone that works with children) is an ongoing and continuous process. We are never done learning, growing, and expanding our knowledge as a professional. To work with children is a personal journey where we never cease learning how to help our children and ourselves to be more than we ever thought we could be or achieve.

Have a peaceful weekend,
Todd

Thoughts for the week: A smile is wonderful, but a belly laugh is magnificent.

Experience is of value in an organization only if it is used to benefit others.

Teacher Talk - Tuesday, January 18th, 38:20 at the Primary School
### Biographical Data

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Todd R. Slimm</th>
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| High School    | Clearview Regional  
|                | Mullica Hill, NJ |
| Undergraduate  | Associate of Arts  
|                | Education  
|                | Gloucester County College  
|                | Sewell, NJ |
|                | Bachelor of Arts  
|                | Elementary Education/Psychology  
|                | Glassboro State College  
|                | Glassboro, NJ |
| Graduate       | Master of Arts  
|                | Reading Education  
|                | Rowan College of New Jersey  
|                | Glassboro, NJ |
|                | Master of Arts  
|                | School Administration  
|                | Rowan University  
|                | Glassboro, NJ |
| Present Occupation | District Supervisor  
|                | Downe Township Schools  
|                | Newport/Dividing Creek, NJ |