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Toward an Understanding of Collaboration

Based on Stakeholder Participation in

School Improvement Initiatives

by

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study is to present the understandings of collaboration held by parents, teachers, and administrators in elementary schools who have experience in collaborating through their involvement in school improvement initiatives. It provides insight into the meaning of collaboration through participants’ description of their collaborative experiences. Further, based on participants’ shared understanding of the phenomenon, this study examines collaboration as a means of achieving successful outcomes related to school improvement. It also examines the perceptions that principals themselves and other stakeholders have regarding the responsibilities and role of the principal in fostering and supporting collaboration.

Following a qualitative focus group research design and using a purposive sampling technique, 16 individuals representing a broad range of stakeholder roles were involved in eight focus group interviews. The participants were from 14 elementary schools in a large public school system in Western Canada. Data were gathered from scheduled group interviews and were supplemented by researcher field notes. These data were analyzed and reported according to the influence of factors on the form, content, process, skills, outcomes, and leadership aspects of the collaborations. The coded data provide rich images of collaboration created through the descriptions of participants’ lived experiences in collaborative settings.

In addition, this study suggests a conceptualization of collaboration that represents the dynamic and complex interplay of the components and various issues portrayed in participant understandings of collaboration. Findings of this study also indicate that collaboration is viewed as an enactment of a democratic way of being in
schools and society. As well, the findings of this study link collaborative interaction and relationships to successful school improvement as reported by participants in their description of the positive outcomes of their collaborations including satisfaction, community, synergy, improved learning and pedagogy, and better decisions in schools. Finally, the influence of leadership on collaborative initiatives also is suggested.

Although this study focuses on what collaboration means to the 16 participants involved in the research, stakeholders in similar roles may gain insight from this study as they conceive, create, and evaluate their own collaborations.

Recommendations for research and practice addressing such issues as teacher and principal behaviours in collaborative contexts, acquisition of collaborative skills and knowledge, recruitment, mentoring, and the redefinition of roles and responsibilities for educational stakeholders are presented.
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family
To my husband, Ron and to my children
Christopher, Jennifer and David
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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Problem to be Investigated

As the call to collaborate resounds in the 21st century approach to organizational behaviour, educators and other professionals may lack the collaborative skills and knowledge needed for successful involvement in the process. In fact, Fullan (1993) has argued that collaboration is one of the most misunderstood concepts in educational change. Consequently, because ineffectiveness may result when individuals neither know what collaboration is nor how to practice it, many researchers addressing collaboration have called for further study of what might be meant by collaboration, of how it might be practiced, and of the outcomes that follow from it (Christiansen, Goulet, Krentz, & Maeers, 1997; Cook & Friend, 1992; John-Steiner, Weber & Minnis, 1998; Little, 1990; O’Shea & O’Shea, 1997; Timperley & Robinson, 1998). Without evidence that they are successful, participants may become disillusioned and abandon the collaborative process. As a result, collaboration runs the risk of becoming another “bandwagon approach” to educational reform (Welch, 1998, p. 34).

Justification for the Study

Collaboration has the potential to improve student learning outcomes (Little, 1982; McLaughlin, 1997; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Rosenholtz, 1989) and to support school-wide decision making and problem solving (Bullock & Thomas, 1994; Caldwell, 1997; Maehr & Midgley, 1996; Murphy & Beck, 1995). Several issues emerged from my examination of the literature on collaboration. First, although the research has contributed to a conceptual framework for collaboration (Cook & Friend, 1991; Little, 1990; Wood & Gray, 1991), very few studies have allowed the essential nature of
collaboration to show itself and speak for itself through participant stories. Therefore this study seeks to understand the participants' way of being in a situation as it was actually lived and experienced by them in a collaborative setting.

The second issue that was evident in my study of the literature on collaboration was that different authors used the term to describe a wide variety of activities and ways of working together. As well, various synonyms such as collegiality, cooperation, and consultation further complicated understanding of the phenomenon. Little empirical research has focused directly on how individuals interact collaboratively and what this means descriptively and conceptually. Therefore this study has the potential to provide insight into stakeholder collaborative perspectives and to link their experiences theoretically and experientially to findings in the literature.

The third issue that emerged from the literature is that several studies have examined collaboration as an adjunct to, or process involved in some other activity. The other activity was the primary focus of the study (Bickel & Hatrup, 1995; Christiansen et al., 1997; Hargreaves, 1994). What remains to be explored then is the study of collaboration itself from the experiential perspective of individuals engaged in the process. This study focuses specifically on the content, processes, and outcomes of collaboration and will add to the limited number of studies addressing collaboration in such direct terms.

**Significance of the Study**

The ability to work collaboratively with others is becoming one of the core requisites of contemporary school reform. Therefore expanding the understanding of collaboration is important for theory, policy, and practice. This study presents the
opportunity for description of participants' lived experience of collaboration at the school level. Because this study examines a broad range of stakeholder perspectives on collaboration, it may contribute to the meaning of collaboration by uncovering common understandings, behaviours, and attributes that foster collaboration. Given that current school reform initiatives such as shared decision making require individuals to work together collaboratively, an increased understanding of how to collaborate may result in positive outcomes in terms of improved student learning.

This study has implications for teachers and administrators at the school and district level. Teachers who experience feelings of isolation in a school because of lack of knowledge of how to collaborate effectively may benefit from this study. To this end, this study may help teachers experience greater support and satisfaction in their teaching. As well, this research could reveal patterns of leadership behaviour or administrative structures that promote collaboration. Research that can guide principals who are engaged in collaborative school improvement initiatives is sorely needed. Only a few empirical studies of collaborative school principal leadership have been published (Haskin, 1995; Prestine, 1991; Rosenblum, Louis, & Rossmiller, 1994). While several studies have addressed the strategies and constructs identified with shared governance leadership such as principal trust, respect for teachers, vision, support, and listening (Conley & Goldman, 1994; Goldman, Dunlop & Conley, 1993; Leithwood, 1992; Telford, 1995), these studies have provided few detailed descriptions of the strategies themselves. Accordingly, because this study provides a rich description of how various constituents have experienced a particular leadership within collaborative reform it has the potential both to support principals and other administrators in their understanding of
collaboration, and to help them to identify and develop practices that support collaboration. Furthermore, because an intent of this study is to identify skills and abilities that are required for collaboration, this research may be instructive for staff development at the school and district level.

Finally, this study could also inform the theory and emerging practices related to issues of management, power and structure, supervision, and leadership that are currently being examined in the growing body of literature on school reform. These reform initiatives include: site-based management (Caldwell, 1999; Caldwell & Spinks, 1992; Malen, Ogawa, & Krantz, 1990), teacher professionalism (Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster & Cobb, 1995; Fullan, 1993; Hargreaves, 1994), shared decision making (Prestine, 1995; Maehr & Midgley, 1996;), school councils (Hargreaves, 1997; McPherson & Crowson, 1994; Malen & Ogawa, 1988), and mentoring (Lick, 2000; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to document and analyze the perspectives of participants who have been involved in collaboration within the context of school improvement initiatives (site-based management, school councils, shared decision making, and teacher professionalism). It also examines the perceptions that principals themselves and other stakeholders have regarding the responsibilities and role of the principal in fostering collaboration.

Through my reading and lived experience, four central questions surfaced and became the focus of this study. Narrowing the study to four questions enabled me to concentrate on what I believe to be the salient features of collaboration. Furthermore not
only did the statement of the research questions focus the study but they also framed the procedures for collecting and analyzing the data. The central research questions guiding the study are as follows:

**General Research Question**

What are the understandings, skills, and attitudes held by participants in school improvement initiatives that result in successful collaboration?

**Specific Research Questions**

1. What is the nature of collaboration?
   
   Subsidiary Questions:
   
   (a) How has the collaborative relationship developed?
   
   (b) How do stakeholders collaborate?
   
   (c) What is the content of collaboration?

2. What are the skills and attitudes necessary for collaboration?

   Subsidiary Question:

   (a) How have participants gained their knowledge and skills in collaboration?

3. What are the ways in which the principal influences collaboration?

   Subsidiary Questions:

   (a) How has the role of the principal changed within the collaborative context?

   (b) How does the principal support collaboration in the school?

4. What are the outcomes of collaboration?

   Subsidiary Questions:

   (a) How do stakeholders describe successful collaboration?

   (b) What is the relationship between collaboration and school improvement?
Paradigm, Assumptions and Limitations

The key issues in this study that guided the selection of the qualitative or interpretive research paradigm were: the search for a deeper understanding of stakeholders' lived experience of collaboration as they view it; and the value of investigating and describing the content and context of participant collaboration in school improvement initiatives. These purposes are typical of the assumptions of qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Assumptions

1. Participants perceive their involvement in school improvement initiatives as collaborative in nature.

2. The perspectives of participants as expressed in the focus group interviews will be trustworthy accounts of their understanding of collaboration.

3. Qualitative research involving the inductive analysis of data in the form of focus group interviews is a valid means of acquiring a description of stakeholders’ perspectives on collaboration.

4. The definition of collaboration used in the study provides a framework for understanding collaboration, but it also preserves the benefits of rich descriptive accounts of participant perspectives of collaboration.

Delimitations

1. The research was delimited to the study of elementary schools. The organization and culture of high schools differ significantly from elementary, and therefore may lead to distinctive forms of collaboration among teachers and other stakeholders at the high school level (Riordon, 1996).
2. The research also was delimited to schools in one district in a large city in Western Canada which requires all schools to prepare, implement, and submit School Improvement Plans on an annual basis.

3. Finally the study was delimited to principals, assistant principals, teachers, and parents who are designated as stakeholders in the School Improvement Process, but did not include students whose involvement in school improvement initiatives is for the most part limited to the high school setting (Levin, 1995).

Limitations

1. A limitation of focus group interviews is the possibility that participants may censor or conform what they say in responding to the interview questions. Although the moderator may be skillful and competent in facilitating group discussion, nevertheless, the presence of a group may affect what some types of participants say about the topic, as well as how they say it (Morgan, 1997).

Definitions of Terms and Concepts

Initially definitions for terms and concepts that were important in this study were included and clarified as the study proceeded.

Collaboration There is lack of agreement in the literature on a single definition for collaboration. For the purposes of this study collaboration refers to an interactive process that includes the following defining characteristics: (a) voluntary nature of collaboration (Cook & Friend, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994) (b) parity among participants (Cook & Friend, 1991; Welch & Sheridan, 1995) (c) mutual goals (Cook & Friend, 1991) (d) joint work or interdependence (Little, 1990) (e) trust, respect, and openness (West, 1990).
**Successful Collaboration**  
Successful collaboration results when stakeholders identify and achieve mutually satisfying outcomes.

**Stakeholder Perspectives**  
The research emphasis on perspectives brings together attributes, opinions, and experiences in an effort to find out not only what participants think about collaboration, but also how they think about it, and why they think the way they do (Morgan, 1997).

**School Improvement Initiatives**  
School improvement refers to “a process that attempts to develop an organization predicated on a set of shared values and norms, personal mastery, critical reflection and collaboration” (Scribner, Cockrell, D., Cockrell, K., & Valentine, 1999, p. 131). School improvement plans call for increased stakeholder involvement (Doud, 1995) and may include such initiatives as site-based management and school councils, shared decision making, and teacher professionalism. The goal of school improvement initiatives is the improvement of student learning. School improvement is also termed restructuring, school reform, organizational learning, or the change process.

**Teacher Professionalism**  
Teacher professionalism has several different meanings in the literature including a greater participation in decision making (Weiss, Cambone, & Wyeth, 1992), development of a stronger knowledge base for teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1995; McLaughlin, 1997), and teacher-to-teacher collaboration (Hargreaves, 1994). The notion that teacher learning is embedded in the day-to-day interactions among staff is inherent in all of the meanings given to teacher professionalism.
Overview of the Methodology

My research design is a self-contained focus group study. The qualitative method uses group interviews as the primary means of data collection, but also relies on researcher field notes as a supplementary data source. My study involved the inductive analysis of data in the form of transcripts from eight group interviews involving 16 participants identified using a purposive sampling technique. Participants represented a broad range of stakeholder roles in the school (parents, principals, assistant/vice principals, teachers). The methodology of the study is explained further in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation is organized into eight chapters with accompanying appendices and references. Chapter 1 consists of an introduction to the problem being investigated accompanied by justification for the study as well as the purpose and significance of the research. In addition Chapter 1 articulates the research questions, provides definitions and a methodology overview, and outlines assumptions and limitations of the study.

Chapter 2 presents a review of relevant literature organized around the themes of collaboration, school reform initiatives, and the relationship between the two variables. Literature that adopts a variety of theoretical perspectives is presented.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of and rationale for the method that was employed in the study. It begins with a justification for the paradigm used in this study, followed by a description of the focus group methodology. This chapter also includes an explanation of site selection and entry, sampling techniques, and participant recruitment. The strategies that were employed in data-gathering, management, and analysis are
included along with details related to measures that were used to improve the trustworthiness of the findings.

Chapter 4 is the first of four chapters in which findings are presented. It begins with demographic information about the 16 participants and their schools. The chapter focuses on the nature of collaboration by presenting findings related to the formation, dynamics, and content of the phenomenon.

Chapters 5 through 7 report the findings for each of the remaining three Specific Research Questions as well as the subsidiary questions included under each central question. Specifically, the focus of each chapter as it relates to collaboration is as follows: Chapter 5 - Skills and Knowledge, Chapter 6 - Leadership, and Chapter 7 - Outcomes. The findings are summarized and discussed in relation to the relevant literature in each of these chapters.

Chapter 8 begins with an overview of the research problem, the research questions, and the methodology of this study. Chapter 8 also outlines the major findings of the inquiry, discusses the implications of the findings, and draws conclusions based on the findings. The chapter also includes recommendations and provides suggestions for further study. In addition, this final chapter closes with a personal reflection on the phenomenon of collaboration and its meaning for school improvement.
Chapter 2 - Review of the Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this review is to present a survey of the literature pertaining to collaboration, contemporary school reform initiatives, and leadership in restructuring schools. This chapter represents a standard literature review section which serves first to focus the study (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Patton, 1990) and second to identify salient issues that merit exploration in the focus group interviews. However, the literature identified herein becomes all the more relevant and meaningful to this inquiry when I revisit it in later chapters and discuss it in light of this study's findings for comparative purposes and as a supplemental validation of emergent categories of data. According to Patton (1990) a literature review that occurs simultaneously with fieldwork allows for creative interplay among the processes of data collection, literature review, and researcher thinking and reflection. Further, I take a more critical approach to the literature in the final chapter of this dissertation where I present key findings and conclusions derived from this study.

Therefore, although a review of the literature was important to this study and is included it in this chapter, I also was aware that reviewing the literature in qualitative inquiry is an ongoing process that could not be completed before data collection and analysis. Indeed, it was my experience as Glesne and Peshkin (1992) explained, that the emerging data often suggested the need to review previously unexamined literature.

Themes of teacher empowerment and professionalism, school-based management, shared decision making, and choice and voice for parents have dominated school reform in the last decade. As school systems in many countries have restructured their
organizational features and activities, the need to develop a more collaborative approach has been a part of the direction. In fact, some authors have asserted that current reform initiatives have relied on collaborative principles (Barth, 1990; Cook & Friend, 1992; Fullan, 1993; O'Shea & O'Shea, 1997). Therefore, shared governance initiatives have been accompanied by endorsements of collaboration as a means of achieving improvement. Consequently, the call for collaboration also has been a pervasive theme within the reform rhetoric (Welch, 1998).

This review begins by describing several collaborative trends in education and society that are influencing the context in which schools operate. An overview of collaboration including its definition, form, content, skills, and process is included in the first part of this review. The review of the literature on collaboration reflects a variety of theoretical perspectives that have been employed by various authors who have studied the nature of collaboration in educational contexts.

The second focus of this review addresses contemporary reforms that embody collaboration in their strategies for school change and improvement. In this second component of this review the historical development of improvement initiatives designed to empower the school site and transfer control to the local community are outlined.

This chapter concludes with an examination of the literature related to the redesign of work for major educational stakeholders within the context of collaborative reform. In particular, literature focusing on the role of the educational leader in light of recent reform efforts is reviewed.
Several societal and educational trends, including decentralization, teacher professionalism, building of community-oriented school cultures, partnerships, and the vision of the school as an organic, interconnected whole, have had an impact on the operation of schools. These new contexts have resulted in changing associations and patterns of interaction amongst all participants in schools (Murphy & Hallinger, 1993; Prestine, 1995). Collaboration may be viewed as a central construct within each of these trends.

Caldwell and Spinks, (1992) described the world-wide move toward self-managing schools as a megatrend in education. Governments and school districts in many parts of the world have pursued initiatives in self-management. Although the language may change from one setting to another such as local management of schools (LMS) and grant-maintained (GM) in England and Wales to site-based management (SBM) in North America, the central components have remained the same. Features have included: a centrally determined framework; a “leaner” bureaucracy and flattened hierarchy; a shift of responsibility in roles, authority, and accountability in schools; shared leadership; and a well informed community exercising more choice in schooling. Because self-management of schools has involved the transfer of much control of education to the local community, it has required a decentralization of decision making to the individual school. At this level, concerned stakeholders have worked collaboratively to make decisions. The move towards devolution of authority to schools has been international in scope (Caldwell, 1997; Malen, Ogawa, & Krantz, 1990).
Second, the trend towards the reinvention of teacher professionalism has become a theme for school reform. The basic tenet within the reform of teacher professionalism is the belief that teachers themselves will have the greatest responsibility for the improvement of practice. Teacher professionalism has different meanings in the literature on school reform. For example, changed decision making in which teachers have had more fundamental choice regarding practice as well as greater participation in administrative decisions has been a part of one redefinition of teacher professionalism (Weiss, 1992). However, Hargreaves (1994) referred to teacher participation in new forms of collaboration and partnerships as the “new professionalism” (p. 24). The new view of the professional has not called for the abandonment of the traditional tenets of professionalism, but rather for an extension and enrichment of the teacher’s role (Caldwell, 1999). Research on the changing role of the teacher has shown that teachers’ roles have been evolving to include becoming problem solvers, change agents, and collaborators (Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster & Cobb, 1995; Fullan, 1993). Finally, writers such as Darling-Hammond (1995) and McLaughlin (1997) reframed professionalism in terms of teachers’ ongoing learning and the development of a stronger knowledge base for teaching. Knowledge building for teachers has required accomplishing the task of learning the skills and perspectives needed in teaching for complex thought and understanding. The new professionalism then, has required that teachers acquire a more sophisticated body of knowledge and skill that has enabled them to teach in new ways. Although teacher professionalism has emerged as a theme for reform (Hargreaves, 1994; McLaughlin, 1997; Scribner et al., 1999) prevailing norms of privacy (Goodlad, 1984) often have blocked the formation of professional communities.
Griffin (1995) found that teachers and administrators equated respect for one another with non-interference and non-questioning of what happens in individual classrooms. Similarly, Meier (1995) cautioned that the trend towards a fuller professional role that enables teachers to learn and lead continuously as they reflect on their practice will take considerable time and effort. Little (1990) also indicated that specific learning initiatives are likely to fail or not be sustained if teachers in a school are not used to working together routinely. For example, peer coaching relationships tend to be more effective when giving and receiving help are valued practices among teachers in the school. Collaborative patterns of interaction are most effective when they are part of the cultural norms of the school (Little, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1989). Therefore, although there has been a movement toward the development of teacher professionalism through collaborative dialogue and reflection, there are barriers that must be overcome if this model of teacher directed reform is to take place.

Third, collaboration reflects the notion of the school as a community. Individuals in much of the developed world have experienced a crisis of community, and have perceived that schools can provide one of the greatest hopes for recreating a sense of community (Hargreaves, 1997). As a result community building efforts have focused on the neighbourhood school because of its geographical convenience as well as its connection to the lives of many families. Schools that are characterized as communities hold common values and expectations that shape member interactions. There is a commitment to interpersonal caring and support that promotes meaningful education. As well, organizational structures facilitate opportunities for colleagues to work together.
The word community derives from the Latin word “communis” meaning common sharing. Sergiovanni (1994) argued that schools must play a vital role in community building by providing care, developing relationships, creating a common purpose, and fostering a sense of attachment or interconnectedness amongst people. Collaboration with its emphasis on common goals, relationships, and mutual interdependence (Cook & Friend, 1992; Welch & Sheridan, 1995) is a way to build community as well as being a “way of life” within a community. In a study that examined the potential for the school improvement plan to influence the development of community, Scribner et al. (1999) found that interconnectedness with peers and interest in critical inquiry were fundamental components of professional learning communities. Therefore, when relationships are built and trust increases, the culture of the group, organization, or community becomes healthier, more open, and more resilient when meeting the conflict that is part of the change process. Furthermore, as the culture strengthens in this way, a learning community emerges consisting of individuals connected and bound to each other through the need to achieve common goals. Within a community, individuals depend on each other for their own learning and work (Guzman, 1994). Without this sense of interdependence, community cannot exist (Palmer, 1998).

Science, technology, and modernization have eroded tradition and have eliminated places where community once existed. Despite the fact that technology has created new forms of communication, people have been struggling to recreate a sense of place, belonging, and support that may be found in a community (Hargreaves, 1997). Inherent within the movement to create community in schools is the process of collaboration.
Another trend noted in society today is the formation of partnerships amongst schools, community, and other organizations. Welch and Sheridan (1995) suggested that no single agency can meet the need of the increasing number of children with educational, social, and medical problems who are at risk of being unsuccessful in school and society. The need for educators to collaborate with special education colleagues as well as to form interprofessional partnerships that integrate services for children can be addressed by partnerships that are "meaningful and moral, not cosmetic and superficial" (Hargreaves, 1997, p. 11). Although partnerships are usually benevolent, sometimes pressure groups from outside the school have more than the children's best interests in mind. For example, partnerships between schools and industry or business may provide connections that are invaluable learning experiences for children, or they may threaten the moral purpose of schooling by controlling or driving the curriculum in directions that are educationally questionable.

Boundaries between organizations have become more permeable, resulting in organizations operating in mutual interaction and influence with each other (Elkind, 1993). As a result schools can no longer hold on to the notion that they are "castles in their communities" (Hargreaves, 1997, p. 11). Issues beyond the school walls have invaded the once traditional structure of school life. Speaking from an organizational perspective, Gerstein and Shaw (1992) described organizational forms for the 21st century that must be fluid and transitory. There is a need to incorporate teams of participants from inside and outside the organization according to the situational context. Similarly educators need to recruit and cultivate partnerships with parents, agency personnel, community leaders, university, and business and come together with unity of
purpose that is devoid of traditional “turf issues” (Hoover & Achilles, 1996, p. 15). In so doing, educational needs of children will be addressed by changing teams and partnerships that have the flexibility, freedom, and authority to work collaboratively. Therefore, as boundaries become transparent, the work of the school not only becomes more visible, but also more closely intertwined and interconnected with family and community. As a result relationships have moved beyond merely being social in nature and have become collaborative partnerships that are characterized by the essential components of collaboration including interdependence, equality, and common purpose (Cook & Friend, 1991; Stewart, 1996; Welch & Sheridan, 1995).

Finally, interdependence, an essential component of collaboration (Gray, 1989; Little, 1990), is reflected in the trend to view the school as an organic, meaningful whole rather than a number of isolated parts (Maehr & Midgley, 1996). Within society as well, indications of the value that people place on relating to others are evident in the widespread interest in interpersonal communication, intercultural sensitivity, and the awareness of gender issues and relationship building (Bush & Folger, 1994).

Within the context of schools Prestine (1995) stated that interrelatedness requires restructuring that is systemic rather than compartmentalized or segmented. Change must happen in such a way that it becomes interwoven into the basic fabric of the organization. In a research project that explored the work of problem solving teams in school renewal in Vermont High Schools, Clarke (1999) found that cross boundary interaction was essential to systemic change in the professional development schools. In the study students, teachers, administrators, parents, and policy makers interacted across organizational lines around a shared focus on student learning. Clarke concluded that
"schools grow toward reform when all the parts interact constantly forming an organism flexible enough to adapt to the pace of change in the surrounding environment" (p. 8). Similarly, Maehr and Midgley (1996) viewed change as an "interlocking process" (p. 126) in which teachers, curriculum, students, leaders, and parents are not viewed as readily separable. Abowitz (1999) also cautioned that seeing the components of a school as separate entities may reinforce the sense of isolation that is experienced by the people who learn and teach daily in separate classrooms (Goodlad, 1984). Accordingly, the success of a school improvement plan requires interaction between many participants at different levels of the educational system and relies on the interdependence of the parts.

In summary several societal and educational trends including new forms of school governance that have involved decentralized control at the school site, teacher professionalism, building of community-oriented school cultures, partnerships, and the vision of schools as organic and interconnected wholes have changed the context and manner in which schools have traditionally operated. Because all of these trends include collaboration as a central theme, it is not surprising that "the ability to collaborate on both a small and large scale is becoming one of the core requisites of postmodern society" (Fullan, 1993, p. 14). Collaboration has become and will continue to be a significant and critical factor in the dynamics of contemporary education and school reform (O'Shea & O'Shea, 1997). This section of the literature review next presents an overview of collaboration.

**Collaboration**

In order to examine how collaboration underpins school improvement initiatives, I first describe collaboration itself. The purpose of this section of the review then is to
identify the nature and complexities of collaboration. To begin, the definition and characteristics are presented along with what is known about collaboration as a process. Next, interpersonal skills that play an integral role in the collaborative process are described. Finally, the benefits and barriers to collaboration are considered.

Describing Collaboration

One of the key criticisms of the literature on collaboration has been that it has suffered from a lack of conceptual clarity. Arriving at a definition of collaboration has been difficult because the constructs of collaboration found in the literature have tended to be "conceptually amorphous" (Little, 1990, p. 509). In fact, some authors have suggested that no consensus exists on an operational definition or theoretical foundation for collaboration (Christansen et al., 1997; Erchul, 1992). They have viewed collaboration as a process and a phenomenon that is undefined and only partially understood. Welch (1998) also agreed that as individuals participate in the collaborative process, assumptions are made about what collaboration means, how it is practiced, and how collaboration actually occurs. Similarly, Fullan (1993) concluded that "collaboration is one of the most misunderstood concepts in the educational change business" (p. 82).

Participants may experience disappointing results because of their lack of understanding of collaboration (Welch, 1998). Therefore, available definitions do provide a useful basis for reflecting upon the phenomenon of collaboration. Furthermore, when individuals develop an understanding of collaboration they are more likely to be successful in assuming the new tasks and responsibilities necessary for working in collaborative ways (Weiss, Cambone, & Wyeth, 1992). In Prestine's (1992) study of restructuring efforts in an American junior high school, participant understanding of
reform components and process contributed to the successful implementation of new programs. In this study, a large proportion of staff developed clarity of understanding by attending workshops that addressed the common principles that were intended to guide the reform.

Authors also have used a multiplicity of terms including collegiality, congeniality, cooperation, consultation, and collaboration to describe a variety of different activities and interactions among individuals. Although the terms often are used synonymously, Little (1987) argued that within each context, participant involvement and interaction vary dramatically in terms of intent, frequency, intensity, and effects. Riordon (1996) following on the work of Little (1987, 1990) and Lortie (1975) conceptualized collegiality as a continuum of peer relations.

Teacher isolation / independence and teacher collaboration / interdependence represented opposite ends of the continuum. Other peer relations such as social interaction, consultation, cooperation, and mentorship appeared on the continuum as forms of collegiality. The degree of interdependence required by the particular relationship determined its placement on the continuum, with collaboration requiring the greatest degree of mutuality. Similarly in this review collegiality is used as an inclusive term to describe ways of working together that involve different purposes and consequences. Accordingly, collaboration is examined as one form of collegiality.

**Congeniality versus Collegiality** Educators may confuse collaboration with collegiality and congeniality (Barth, 1990). In congenial environments, individuals maintain superficial harmony by refraining from articulating organizational goals, by avoiding systematic review of practices, and by staying away from topics or situations
that might create conflict. Schools may pursue congenial staff relations at the expense of examining diverse points of view as demonstrated in a study by Timperly and Robinson (1998). In a case study that examined the collegial problem solving process at a high school, Timperly and Robinson found that the staff's desire to maintain a cohesive school culture led to little overt dissent or debate about issues. The staff readily endorsed proposed solutions even though they were not committed to their implementation. Congenial relations were valued more than the quality of problem solving.

Moreover, a pervasive culture of congeniality may mitigate against building relationships in which dissident views are recognized as contributing to effective learning and problem solving. Griffin (1995) referred to the congeniality amongst members of a school staff as “prevailing forms of politesse” (p. 29). Griffin concluded that the non-confrontative social organization of schools prevented the process of shared decision making from having an effect on teachers’ classroom practice.

In contrast, collegiality, and collaboration as a form thereof, is not about people getting along with each other at all times. In fact, in collaboration, differences in participants’ perspectives often may result in their raising challenging questions about educational practice while engaging in mutually beneficial relationships (Stewart, 1994).

Definitions – Key Components

Within the plethora of terminology and definitions for collaboration, researchers have identified several key components that describe the essential nature of collaboration (Wood & Gray, 1991). Welch and Sheridan (1995) synthesized salient features from varying definitions in arriving at their own. Similarly, drawing on the work of significant authors who have studied collaboration, I outline a definition that includes the following
components: common goals (Cook & Friend, 1991; Welch & Sheridan, 1995), joint work or interdependence (Gray, 1989; Little, 1996; Welch & Sheridan, 1995), parity or equality (Cook & Friend, 1991; Welch & Sheridan, 1995) and voluntary participation (Cook & Friend, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994). Next, each of these elements is considered separately and examined for its significance within a framework for collaboration.

**Common Goals, Joint Work, and Interdependence**  Participants in collaborative relationships hold common or mutual goals that may be beneficial to their organization, to themselves, and to each other (Cook & Friend, 1991; Welch & Sheridan, 1995; West, 1996). Moreover, the goals are negotiated and formulated by the participants themselves, rather than resulting from an external mandate. The acceptance of shared goals contributes to a sense of bonding among individuals that results in a mutual commitment to each other to achieve the goals (Senge, 1990). When Leithwood and Jantzi (1991) examined the level of collaboration in schools, they found that the schools that achieved the most collaborative cultures had articulated a set of clear shared goals for school improvement.

Individuals having a common goal are motivated to collaborate when they believe that they require each other’s contribution to be successful in their own work. Little (1990) referred to the shared responsibility to achieve the goals of teaching as joint work. When engaged in joint work, individuals are dependent on each other to reach their goals. Gray (1989) defined collaboration and included the notion of interdependence in describing “parties who search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible” (p. 5). Similarly, Basaraba and Drake (1997) described their essential interdependence as necessary in fulfilling their personal goals in a school-university
partnership. Although participants' individual goals may reflect different perspectives, most authors have agreed that in collaboration, goals should be mutually beneficial, compatible, articulated, and accepted by all participants (Elliot & Woloshyn, 1997).

**Parity** Parity or equality in relationships is another essential component of collaboration (Cook & Friend, 1991; Cole & Knowles, 1993; Welch & Sheridan, 1995; Stewart, 1996). In education collaboration may bring together people of unequal status such as superintendents, principals, teachers, and support staff. However, all participants must believe that they have a meaningful contribution to make to the collaborative and that their input is valued by others.

John-Steiner, Minnis and Weber (1998) referred to participants in true collaboration as representing “complementary domains of expertise” (p. 776). Furthermore, according to John-Steiner, Minnis and Weber in true collaboration there is a commitment to shared resources, power, and talent; no individual's point of view dominates and the work reflects a blending of all participants' contributions.

Collaboration, then, provides educators who have traditionally been involved in hierarchical and competitive top-down structures with a means of working towards their goals in more horizontal, equitable, and interactive patterns. Leaders' work, in particular, depends less on positional authority and more on interpersonal work relationships. As a result, the role of the principal has changed within the collaborative context of working with people. However, becoming an equal partner in collaborative relationships may be difficult for some individuals who occupy leadership positions because it involves a new conception of their relationship to power. Letting go of their power may be a barrier that
may stand in the way of the principal’s becoming an equal partner in decision making and collaboration (Hallinger, Murphy & Hausman, 1992; Prestine, 1991).

Basaraba and Drake (1992) undertook research as part of a school-university partnership and explored the issue of equality in collaboration. Responding to the question of who held the power in their relationship and whether it was shared equally, Basaraba and Drake concluded that their shifting roles as experts addressed the issue of power in their collaboration. Both had expertise and authority in different areas, and they had different strengths. Therefore, depending on the needs within their evolving collaborative context, either one or the other was in the position of having more or less input and power in the decision making process. Also, Basaraba and Drake indicated that there was an open negotiation of power, sharing, and role expectations between them as the project progressed. Similarly, Bickel and Hattrup (1995) found that negotiating the successful working out of the sharing of power among researchers and teachers was a critical and ultimately highly successful component of their collaboration. Furthermore, over the course of their 54 month research in the teaching and learning of mathematics, Bickel and Hattrup indicated that equality in status between research and practitioner communities was an essential ingredient to sound collaboration.

Lieberman and Grolnick (1997) concluded that “learning to collaborate is about sharing power, knowledge, and influence” (p. 207). In schools today there are a number of people including parents, community members, teachers, administrators, and students who demand an influence in the process of schooling. Consequently when stakeholders in education collaborate their mutual influence involves shared power and equality amongst participants. As well, leadership when defined in terms of power and influence
Bolman & Deal, 1995) is also shared and resides in various people at different times depending on the needs and context (Aviolio, 1997).

The norms of professional egalitarianism that pervade the teaching profession should provide the ideal conditions for the development of collaborative relationships among teachers. Acknowledged differences in status based on knowledge, skill, and initiative are seen as “taboo” within the culture of teaching. However, ironically, it is often because of these prevailing norms of equality that teacher collaboration does not occur. That is, while it is legitimate for novices to request assistance from more experienced peers, such requests often are perceived by others as admissions of incompetence on the part of the teacher. Similarly, unsolicited offers of advice on practice or other curricular assistance may be interpreted as an expression of arrogance or as a play for higher status (Huberman, 1995; Little, 1990).

Friedman (1997) examined the relationship between team concept and whole school practice in a case study that focused on the development of an innovative vocational program in a secondary school in Israel. Friedman found that successful team innovations at the classroom level failed to influence teaching practice in the overall school. Muncey (1994), working within the context of the Coalition for Essential Schools in Illinois, also indicated that disseminating innovation so that it had an impact on the whole school was difficult to achieve. Muncey framed the problem in terms of political conflict, indicating that the reform involved perceived shifts in power, prestige, and responsibility among teachers in the school. In these cases, the equality and consistency ethos among teachers proved to be a barrier to sustained and widespread change in the whole school.
Collaboration is Voluntary  Individuals participate in collaboration on a free and voluntary basis (Cook & Friend, 1991). Collaborative work relations arise not from administrative constraint or compulsion, but from the perceived value and understanding among participants that working together is productive. Hargreaves (1994) used the term contrived collegiality to describe conditions which may result when collaboration is mandated by administration. When working together is imposed on individuals, the result is a collaboration that is superficial in nature; compulsory, not voluntary; predetermined and fixed in time and space; and predictable in its outcomes (Hargreaves, 1994). Furthermore, when collaboration is imposed on participants by individuals of higher status, the collaborative relationship then also lacks the key component of equality. Therefore, contrived collegiality results when administrators wish to control and regulate more than true collaboration might allow them to do. In the end such mandates simply recreate a new version of top-down, hierarchical organization.

Da Costa (1995) found that teachers working in a school that mandated the formation of teacher collaboration teams developed trust more slowly than those teachers working in schools in which individuals chose to collaborate. Furthermore Da Costa indicated that when teachers chose to work together, many impediments, including lack of time and scheduling conflicts, became challenges which they enthusiastically embraced. For teachers whose schools had a collaboration policy, these obstacles often became insurmountable barriers. Riordon (1996) also found that teachers resented being forced to work collaboratively. Leithwood and Jantzi (1991) identified twelve schools in which collaboration was a goal, and examined the reasons for variations in the degree of collaboration achieved in each setting. They used six indicators of collaboration (Little,
to estimate the level of collaboration in each school. The data indicated a high
degree of collaboration in all schools, although there was significant variation across the
schools. Leithwood and Jantzi found that staff motivation to participate in collaboration
was greatest in schools with the highest levels of collaboration. They concluded that
early and sustained motivation of teachers to participate in reform efforts may be a crucial
factor in the development of a collaborative culture. Similarly, in a study which
examined the collaborative practices of resource programs, Karge, McClare and Patton
(1995) reported that teacher attitude was identified as the most important factor for
successful collaboration in a survey that rank ordered the factors important to the
collaborative process. In these studies, attitude, desire, and motivation emerged as
essential components of the voluntary nature of the collaboratory process.

The theory and research on collaboration have offered definitions of the term that
have included several key components: common goals (Cook & Friend, 1991; Welch &
Sheridan, 1995); joint work or interdependence (Gray, 1989; Little, 1990; Welch and
Sheridan, 1995); parity (Cole & Knowles, 1993; Cook & Friend, 1991; Welch &
Sheridan, 1995); and voluntary participation (Cook & Friend, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994).
Although there is no agreement in the literature on a single definition for collaboration,
the key components have served to develop a common language and understanding of the
term. Furthermore, for the purpose of this review, the key components provide a filter for
examining the extent to which school reform embodies collaborative principles.

The Process of Collaboration

Collaboration requires new modes of working together (Stewart, 1996). Team
interactions throughout the collaborative process are characterized by mutual respect,
trust, and open communication (West, 1990). Therefore, in examining the collaborative process I first consider the meaning and development of trust and respect in collaborative relationships. Next, the communication skills required in the collaborative process are discussed. Within the context of communication the crucial role that effective dialogue plays in the collaborative process is considered. Finally conflict, viewed as a natural and necessary part of collaboration, is examined for its significance in the process.

**Trust and Respect**

Trust and respect, essential components of the collaborative process, may be invested in people or processes (Hargreaves, 1994). A climate of trust, respect, and openness is required to build and sustain collaboration (da Costa, 1996; Hoover & Achilles, 1996; Stewart, 1996) but trust also may be an outcome of the process. Characteristics of collaboration that serve as both prerequisites and outcomes of collaboration are termed emergent (Karge, McClare, & Patton, 1995). Emergent characteristics represent the risks that participants encounter in the collaborative model. As Christanson et al. (1996) concluded after five years of collaborative involvement in a professional development school it was through learning to trust each other that they were willing to take risks with their own beliefs and that dialogue became possible. The dialogue that occurred resulted in new insights, learning, and change for all the participants. Similarly, Short and Greer (1997) conducted a three year study of school change and found that trust was a foundational ingredient in teacher empowerment. In this case trust in the process was also important as participants trusted new organizational and leadership patterns. Both of these studies also showed that considerable time was
needed to cultivate the relationship of trust, confidence, and inter-relatedness that is at the heart of collaboration (Stewart, 1996).

Trust is related to the interdependent nature of collaborative relationships. Interrelatedness in relationship requires that individuals recognize and value who the other person is, as well as the skills and expertise that the other individual brings to the collaboration. In the school setting respect refers to the honoring of the expertise of others. Although respect for teachers' abilities, talents, and classroom efforts is necessary to begin school restructuring, respect, like trust, also becomes an outcome of the process. DePree (1989) referred to respecting the different perspectives of one's colleagues as "understanding the diversity of their gifts" (p. 25). Other authors (Friend & Cook, 1992; Fullan, 1998; O'Shea & O'Shea, 1997) also have suggested that professionals need to be aware of their own viewpoints and to consider multiple perspectives in order to collaborate effectively. Without understanding and respect parity cannot exist between colleagues and the collaborative process may be blocked.

However, although the educational literature has attested to the importance of trust in the collaborative process, it has offered little evidence as to how trust might be developed. In fact, Roy (1995) described trust as "elusive" and "difficult to cultivate" (p. 22). Staff development may focus on building trust through various team building activities and workshops. Dukewits and Gowin (1996) described team building games that they have used as first-level trust building activities. However, educators sometimes feel that such games take time away from dialogue in which individuals can build trust through coming to know each other's beliefs about their work together.
Hudson and Glomb (1997) described how faculty at Southern Utah University developed understanding for each other's work and respect for each other in the process of developing an instructional model for collaboration. Hudson and Glomb found that the most important factor in the implementation of collaborative instruction for pre-service teachers was, in fact, the degree of collaboration among faculty in the elementary, secondary, and special education programs. The authors observed that when faculty took the time to get to know each other and to learn about each other's programs, mutual goals and respect resulted.

Thus individuals may develop trust and respect for each other through trustworthy and honorable interactions and experiences in their work together. Open and honest communication is crucial to the development of trusting relationships and is a key component of the collaborative process (West, 1990). Successful implementation of collaboration may depend more on the development of collaborative skills and strengthening of relationships than on isolated workshops intended to build trust and team spirit (Hudson & Glomb, 1997).

**Collaborative Skills**

The literature on collaboration clearly has called for participants to have a knowledge base and set of skills regarding collaboration methods (Hudson & Glomb, 1997; Mutchler & Duttweiler, 1990; O'Shea & O'Shea, 1997; Roy, 1995; Welch, 1998). Using the term collaborative skills, authors have described a variety of different behaviours necessary for successful collaboration (Hart, 1995). Mutchler and Duttweiler (1990) examined the implementation of shared decision making in a school and questioned participants as to the type of training that they felt was necessary to initiate
shared decision making successfully. Seventy-five percent of the participants said they required collaborative skills, which they listed as consensus building, conflict resolution, interpersonal communication, commitment, and team building.

However, Hudson and Glomb specifically identified interpersonal skills, including awareness of nonverbal behaviours, strong verbal skills, and active listening as collaborative skills. Hudson and Glomb maintained that basic communication skills were essential to the next level of communication which they termed strategies. Strategies included problem solving, planning cooperatively, negotiating, and conflict resolution. According to Hudson and Glomb good verbal and nonverbal skills were essential for the effective use of a strategy. Similarly Welch, (1998) maintained that embedded within decision-making, consensus, and the resolution of conflict is the prerequisite of effective communication.

Furthermore, the assumption is often made that individuals who have worked in conventional or traditional ways in schools will know how to collaborate effectively. However teachers, principals, and parents have indicated that they often feel ill-prepared for collaboration (McLaughlin, 1997; McPherson & Crowson, 1994; Weiss & Cambone, 1994). Restructuring plans have not fostered the learning of new attitudes and skills that have been fundamental to shared decision making and other school improvement initiatives. As a result, when individuals lack the essential skills in communication, collaboration may not take place or may be unsuccessful.

Therefore, although the research on collaboration has called for participants to acquire new and different skills, the exact description of the collaborative skills and how they might be acquired is missing in the literature. It is generally agreed that one of the
most neglected aspects of teacher training is thorough preparation in the diverse skills that are needed to work in the collaborative context of today's schools (Hart, 1995; Morgan, 1989; Welch, 1998). Hudson and Glomb, (1997) whose research has provided direction for skill development have cautioned that the lack of attention to collaboration instruction for all educators may result in "disparity, poor communication, and failure to attain child-related objectives" (p. 443).

Dialogue  Dialogue is crucial to the collaborative process as teachers and principals engage in conversation about practice. The word dialogue comes from the Greek, dialogues. "Dia" means through and "logos" means the word. In the "meaning-making-through words" process, group members inquire into their own and other's beliefs, values, and assumptions to reach a deeper level of understanding. As a process or strategy in communication, dialogue calls upon the unique communication skills of each individual (Hudson & Glomb, 1997).

Barth (1990) argued that adults in schools need to talk to each other in order for change to occur. Similarly Garmston and Wellman, (1998) maintained that developing a staff's ability to talk together might be the most proactive commitment that a faculty could make for student learning. Talk in collaboration has purpose. It is informed by knowledge of self, others, theory, and practice. Through informed talk, the individual and collective meanings in collaborative experiences come together in relationships.

Conflict  Conflict seems to be a necessary part of the collaborative process. It is a natural dimension of collaboration that brings together people with different perspectives. Conflict is an inevitable by-product of shared decision making (Bickel & Hattrup, 1995), and is not necessarily negative or something to avoid. Increased stakeholder involvement
in decision making has resulted in a more highly charged political environment which in turn has created more conflict.

Conflict, by the very nature of the word, calls forth reactions of fear, discomfort, frustration, embarrassment, and anger. Conflict is uncomfortable for people because of these negative emotions. It is for this reason that individuals resent change and stay with what is comfortable. Educators, as well, tend to view conflict as something to be avoided. As a result schools often pursue congenial staff relations at the expense of examining differences and diverse points of view (Barth, 1990).

Strong beliefs and commitment accompany school reform efforts and conflicting goals may become a part of the mix. Therefore conflicts among parents, government agencies, and school staff are almost inevitable. Leaders must resolve conflicts that need to be addressed in order for reform to move forward. Previously leaders have focused on managing and eliminating organizational conflicts. Restructuring has created a need for conflict managers. Principals and teachers need the skills of conflict resolution which in itself is a collaborative process or strategy requiring effective communication skills.

Conflict often contains the seeds of breakthrough in the change process. Dissonance and a sense of dissatisfaction are at the root of change. The assumption is that the cognitive need for consistency and the reduction of contradiction will serve as a need for action (Maehr & Midgley, 1996). Dissonance and problems then become a creative force when people talk, explore, find solutions together; when, in fact they become opportunities for dialogue. Beck (1995) undertook research at a high school that had the reputation of being one of the most troubled schools in Los Angeles. However Beck discovered that the school had developed a nurturing, community-oriented culture.
She concluded that part of the reason the school had managed to change was because the principal allowed conflict to surface and handled it constructively.

Conversely when there is too much dissonance or conflict, participants may be paralyzed into inactivity. Hargreaves (1994) reported that when teachers were overwhelmed by demands for change, the results often were that they overextended themselves, burned out, became cynical, or even left the profession altogether. Therefore, at times when conflict is excessive, educators may need to consider continuity and consolidation to be as important as improvement and change (Hargreaves & Evans, 1997).

**Conflict Resolution** Conflict resolution is an essential skill for teachers and administrators within the collaborative reform context of today's schools (Hart, 1995; Mutchler & Duttweiler, 1990; Roy, 1995). However, Welch (1998) noted that teachers, who are often isolated within their own classroom with few opportunities to work with colleagues, typically receive no training in conflict management strategies. Disputes are often resolved in informal settings such as small group meetings, out of school get-togethers, or through individual interactions during the day. Peterson and Warren (1994) noted that situations in which there is open and honest communication are the most efficient ways to deal with disagreements.

One such approach to conflict resolution, transformative mediation, (Bush & Folger, 1994) relies on dialogue to create new possibilities for valid communication. The objectives of transformative mediation involve the growth or learning of the individuals involved in the conflict. Its effectiveness as a strategy requires participants to develop
their abilities in the art of communication by acquiring greater knowledge, skills, and experience in the total process.

In summary, a successful collaboration depends upon the personal interaction of the participants. Several key elements characterize the collaborative process including trust, respect, and effective interpersonal communication. Collaboration is not a quick and easy process but one that demands much of participants in terms of conflict and tension, time, energy, and new skills and understandings (Stewart, 1996). Although the literature has provided ideas, directions, and insight into the collaborative process, the complex and contextual nature of collaboration has made it difficult to follow a step-by-step recipe for implementing the process (Fullan, 1998; Hoover & Achilles, 1996). Rich descriptions of participants’ collaborative experiences may lead to new understanding of the process (Elliot & Woloshyn, 1997).

**Benefits of Collaboration**

Stakeholders voluntarily engage in collaboration when they perceive that they will derive some benefit, either individual or collective, from working together (Wood & Gray, 1991). Donaldson and Sanderson (1996) described three basic arguments for collaboration in schools. First, working together has direct benefits for children. The overriding goal of collaboration is educational improvement and effectiveness. Second, collaboration benefits educators because it allows teachers and administrators to learn from the experience and expertise of their peers. Third, collaboration leads to the professional enrichment of the school’s culture. Collaboration can play a large role in creating an occupational ethos that shapes what teachers choose to do and learn. These
three arguments have provided a framework for examining the positive outcomes of collaboration.

**Improved Student Learning**

Opportunities and time for professional collaboration outside the classroom are closely related to standards of student achievement inside the classroom. Rosenholtz’s (1989) classic study of teacher’s work and student achievement in 78 elementary schools in the United States showed clear connections between the existence of collaborative work cultures in teaching and higher rates of student achievement in literacy and numeracy. Similarly, McLaughlin’s (1997) extensive work in United States secondary schools indicated equally powerful connections between strong professional communities among teachers, standards for students, and student achievement. As well, studies by Newmann and Wehlage (1995) provided evidence that closer teamwork on day-to-day pedagogical challenges led to the improvement of teaching and brought benefits to students. Lieberman and Miller (1991) also reviewed teaching conditions and professional development and linked collaboration to enriched teaching and better learning.

Wheatley, Brent, and Deel (1997) used both quantitative and qualitative analyses to examine the effects of a collaborative model on student learning. The goals of the study were to improve one of North Carolina’s low achieving elementary schools and to design an exportable collaborative model to “jump start” school improvement. A partnership developed between the staff at the school, a team from the university, and a group of master teachers who provided staff development through class demonstrations as well as support and feedback to teachers through a coaching model. Within a year the
school had achieved 100% of the district’s benchmark goals in reading, writing, and math. This was a success rate achieved by only 10% of the schools in the district. An added component of the research was the inclusion of focus groups that validated the general sense of success felt by faculty, staff, students, and parents. The focus group data supplemented the quantitative data on academic performance to create a more comprehensive view of improvements.

Although some researchers have maintained that the links between collaboration and student learning are still tentative (Acheson & Gall, 1992; Hoover & Achilles, 1996) the claims from studies such as those conducted by Little (1982), McLaughlin (1997), Newman and Wehlage (1995), and Rosenholtz (1989) have enjoyed widespread support in practitioner and policy communities. Furthermore other researchers in the field such as daCosta (1995), Fullan and Hargreaves (1991), Little (1987), and Wheatly, Brent and Deel (1997) also have agreed that when teachers collaborate, their students should experience positive outcomes in achievement, attitude, and behaviour.

**Teacher Professionalism**

Collaboration may enhance the professional development opportunities for teachers to talk and reflect on practice, share critique, and support each other (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Little, 1993). Teacher professionalism has several different meanings in the literature including a greater participation in decision making (Weiss, Cambone, & Wyeth, 1992), development of a stronger knowledge base for teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1995; McLaughlin 1997), and teacher-to-teacher collaboration (Hargreaves, 1994). However, the notion that teacher learning is “embedded” in the day-to-day interactions among staff is inherent in all of the meanings given to teacher
professionalism. As well, the view that teachers’ growth and development is best contextualized within their own workplace is consistent with current thinking and research in the area of staff development (Barth, 1990; Sparks, 1995).

McLaughlin (1997) stated that overcoming teacher isolation is one of the principles that must be in place for teacher professionalism to move forward. Similarly, many authors have argued that teachers can no longer continue to work isolated in their classrooms (Barth, 1990; Darling-Hammond, 1990; Hart, 1994; Little, 1993). However, some teachers may view the isolated teacher model as the safest and most secure professional role to maintain among peers. Therefore, teachers and administrators first must be convinced that the isolation of teachers in their classrooms and the top-down decision making are shortchanging both those who work in schools and those who are taught there (Scott & Smith, 1987). Several authors have questioned the applicability of collaboration in the area of professional development. Huberman’s (1990) research cautioned that teachers view themselves as “independent artisans” who derive their satisfaction from independent classroom work. Day (1997) described teacher learning as both interdependent, and independent, allowing for the kind of development that might be focused upon either personal need or a long-term professional need of the teacher.

Furthermore, rather than collaboration resulting in teacher professional growth, the implementation of a team structure may have a tendency to fragment a school into cloistered competitive groups (Freidman, 1997; Prestine, 1994). The result may be jealousy and competition among groups, teams, or individuals in the school. Consequently meaningful collaboration for teachers working in an atmosphere of professional jealousies may be futile (Barlow & Robertson, 1994).
The capacity for collaboration to promote teacher professionalism is well documented in the literature. Studies such as that conducted by Sandell and Sullivan, (1992) clearly indicated that teachers judged “informal influences such as discussions about the practice of teaching, opportunities to observe another’s teaching, and to teach and learn from one another” (p. 138) as more beneficial to themselves than formal professional development activities. However, other authors have cautioned that the sharing of experience may not be valuable if it leads to cynicism and despair or if the bonds that are formed result in the formation of power blocs within the school (Hargreaves, 1994).

Collaborative Cultures

The third major benefit of collaboration is the professional enrichment of the school’s culture. Every organization has a culture consisting of the patterns of work and relationships that are formed together. The pattern of behaviour, or norms, within a culture is shaped by the beliefs and attitudes held by members of a school community. Implementation of reform efforts occurs within the day-to-day happenings of schools which are influenced by the norms that govern the way people interact and relate to each other. That is, reform initiatives are affected by school cultures which traditionally are averse to collaboration and change due to existing values of isolation and distinct lines of authority (Fullan, 1993; Hargreaves, 1995). In fact, Sarason (1991) argued that school reform will be less than successful as long as schools are dominated by norms of autonomy and isolation.

Similarly Kurpius (1991) maintained that the culture of an organization is the most powerful determinant of the degree of collaboration within it. Indeed Little (1982)
and Rosenholtz (1989) found that collaborative relationships could not be imposed on teachers if norms of sharing and dialogue were not part of the school culture. Rather, teachers remained committed to their own pedagogical interest, protected by school norms of self-reliance. These traditional norms of interaction have created a highly autonomous culture.

However, evidence of a different collaborative teaching culture has emerged in some schools today. Fullan (1993) used the term reculturing to describe the process by which a school redefines its culture by changing norms, values, and relationships to foster new ways of working together. Climates of trust in which teachers pool resources, take risks, and influence each other in their practice are characteristic of collaborative work. Within the context of reculturing, collaboration may lead to a new way of interacting and being with each other that in turn may become sustained by ongoing collaborative work relationships.

**Barriers to Collaboration**

As individuals engage in collaboration they may expect to encounter age-old barriers to new approaches such as resistance, attitudes, and lack of time, training, and support (O'Shea & O'Shea, 1996). Phillips and McCullough (1990) divided the diverse range of obstacles to collaboration into four categories: conceptual, pragmatic, attitudinal, and professional.

Conceptual barriers have included notions that members of the school community (administrators, teachers, parents, and students) have held regarding their role and the roles of others. Conceptions of role are usually shaped over time and are reinforced by individuals within the profession and others outside the profession. Collaboration has
had major implications for role transformation and change for all members of the school community. However new role expectations have been a source of stress for participants and may inhibit collaboration. Therefore changes in traditional roles may engender anxiety and in some cases resistance.

Pragmatic barriers have been associated with logistic factors within the school. Lack of time typically has been given as the most pervasive block to collaboration. Other pragmatic difficulties have included large classes or case loads, scheduling problems, and space.

Attitudinal barriers have included beliefs, assumptions, or expectations held by participants regarding possible outcomes that may impede the collaborative process. Hatch (1998) described how the work of the ATLAS (Authentic Teaching, Learning, and Assessment for all Students) collaborative, despite considerable funding, broad initial agreements, and good relationships at the highest levels, was unable to make decisions to carry out work in a collaborative manner. Hatch attributed the lack of success of the collaborative to deeply embedded beliefs and differences in theories of action held by the different partners in the collaboration.

The final barrier in implementing collaboration has related to the professional issue of lack of training or differences in training among individuals. An important consideration has been that as more people have been involved in the decision making process of the school, there has been a need for all individuals to gain understanding of what working in collaborative ways means for them.
Collaborative Reform

Parent and teacher participation in school-based decision making, teacher empowerment and professionalism, and site-based management have become dominant themes in the debate over school reform. Cook and Friend (1992) maintained that participatory management and other terms found in the school reform movement have reflected collaboration. Similarly, O’Shea and O’Shea, (1997) described collaboration as “a cornerstone of effective school reform” (p. 454). Because the “reform rhetoric is rampant with calls for collaboration” (Welch, 1998, p. 27) this review first examined the meaning of collaboration in the literature. Next, using a research-based description for collaboration, I examine the extent to which contemporary reform embodies collaborative principles and might therefore be termed collaborative reform. Finally, the implications that collaboration holds for school-based participants who are involved in working together in new and different ways are examined.

The Reform Agenda

“Attempts to change, improve and reform schools in this country enjoy a long and checkered history” (Murphy, 1993, p. 1). Beginning in the mid to late 1980s, the mandated, centralized improvement strategies that dominated the reform agenda in the early 1980s fell into disfavor. Such perspectives had considered the school as a hierarchically and bureaucratically structured system in which change or reform was a directed, objective, and technical process. Innovations originated in a top-down process that passed externally generated programs through hierarchical structures. It was evident however that the success of even the best planned initiatives depended on the contextual nature of the work at each individual school for interpretation and implementation.
Therefore the centrally mandated and imposed approaches to reform were abandoned and in their place came approaches designed to empower the school site and transfer control to the local community. Thus began the second wave of reform, also known as the restructuring movement. Reformists in this second wave of reform have advocated for fundamental changes in the governance structure of schools to enhance teacher professionalism and to involve all stakeholders in decision making.

Little (1993) described “five streams of reform” (p. 30) that have dominated the second wave of reform or restructuring movement. Little (1993) included initiatives in the following areas as central components of the contemporary reform agenda: (1) Reforms in subject matter (standards, curriculum, pedagogy), (2) Reforms centered on problems of equity among a diverse population, (3) Reforms in assessment, (4) Changes in the social organization of schooling, and (5) Professionalization of teaching (pp. 131-132). Little (1993) cautioned that these reforms “cannot be done well piecemeal, nor are they reforms that succeed if attempted only in isolated classrooms” (p. 132). Lieberman and Miller (1984) also described the reform process as an endeavor that has demanded collective efforts.

Restructuring

The term restructuring has come to represent the view that today’s schools require fundamental changes that cannot be achieved through minor or separate innovations applied to existing structures (Leithwood, 1994). Rather, restructuring is a commitment to systemic change that aims at focusing on improvement of the system itself. The process includes attending to all parts according to the interactive and integrated nature of restructuring. Murphy (1993) referred to restructuring as “an interconnected business”
highlighting the interdependent nature of the process. Cook and Friend (1991) and Little (1990) also described interdependence as one of the defining characteristics of collaboration. Therefore the process of collaboration has been consistent with the aims and purposes of restructuring for reform.

Newmann (1993) identified four common themes in schools where restructuring initiatives were underway. Similar to Little’s description of “streams of reform” (p. 30) these themes included “major changes in students’ learning experiences, in the professional lives of teachers, in the governance and management of schools, and in the ways in which schools are held accountable” (p. 4).

Therefore, restructuring has encompassed many initiatives and has represented a variety of change processes. One of the most common types of restructuring, site-based management, involved schools moving from a closed model of governance emphasizing centralized control and management to a more open model emphasizing decentralized participation by stakeholders. Among the many initiatives associated with school restructuring undoubtedly the most pervasive has been site-based management (Murphy & Beck, 1995). School systems in Western countries have been restructuring their organizational features by decentralizing decision making and by developing a more collaborative approach (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992).

Besides site-based management, other examples of new structures that may encourage more collaborative, flexible, and responsive ways of working together have included teacher teams, multi-age groups, block timetabling, interdisciplinary programs, and mini schools or sub-schools at the high school level where teachers have worked with a reduced number of students (Hargreaves, 1997). Therefore, restructuring has included
changes in the formal structure of schooling in terms of organization, timetables, roles, and other such features.

Kurpius (1991) stated that the culture of a school influences the level of collaboration and reform within the organization. However, attempts to change cultures to more collaborative forms may be undermined by existing structures. Cultures are grounded in structures of time and space. These structures can play a role in facilitating the building of relationships or they may play a role in blocking their formation. For example if a timetable does not provide time for teachers to meet during the regular school day collaboration may become exhausting and contrived. Teachers may view collaboration as an extra rather than as an integral component to ordinary commitments and working relationships. Therefore internal structures may become roadblocks to collaboration if educators perceive that they are inadequate. Similarly school space that traditionally has been structured so that adults work largely in isolation from one another may also be a barrier to collaboration. Newmann and Wehlage, (1995) have noted that newly constructed schools have included teacher work areas and team planning rooms reflecting the belief that collaborative activity can enhance teacher’s competence. Conversely Riordon (1996) indicated that although environments conducive to collaboration have been important, successful collaboration has depended more on people willingly committing their time to work and to colleagues whom they value. Hargreaves (1994) also warned that contrived collegiality may result when relationships are regulated by administration and imposed into existing structures that lend themselves to collaborative work.
School districts have adopted structurally based approaches to school reform such as school-based management so as to improve school productivity and student learning (David, 1989). However researchers have pointed to the absence of evidence that self-management has resulted in the improvement in learning outcomes for students (Fullan, 1993; Weiss et al., 1992; Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992). Griffin’s (1995) study that examined teacher participation in school decision making indicated no changes in teacher practice as a result of being involved in the shared decision making at the school. In fact some teachers cited the privacy of practice as a reason for not attending to pedagogy as an aspect of shared decision making. Taylor and Teddlie (1992) drew similar conclusions in their study of change in classroom practice in a district widely acclaimed as a model of restructuring. They concluded that teachers in the study did not alter their practice even though they were involved in increased participation in decision making in the school.

Weiss et al. (1992) investigated shared decision in 12 high schools in 11 states in the United States. They found that teachers in the site-based management schools (half of the schools were selected because they had implemented shared decision making) were more likely to discuss issues in the decision making process. However the same teachers did not discuss issues of curriculum or their own practice any more frequently than teachers in the traditionally managed schools in the study.

supported Fullan’s conclusion, indicating that structural changes in and of themselves have held small promise of producing competence or commitment on the part of teachers or students. According to Newmann, restructuring initiatives may provide the occasions for change but they have not assured them.

Reculturing

The prime focus for educational change according to Fullan (1993) and Hargreaves (1994) should be cultures of teaching. Fullan (1993) described the process as reculturing schools. In contrast to restructuring which has been concerned with the formal structural organization of schools, reculturing has involved changing the norms, values, incentives, skills, and relationships in the organization to foster a different way of working together. In order for collective action and dialogue to take place, positive relationships must be built among teachers and others -- relationships that form the culture of the school. Developing or altering these relationships has involved reculturing the school.

As one of the respondents in a study on shared decision making mentioned, “What is needed is more than a change in formal structure; it requires a change in the culture of the school as well. The value of staff, their expectations for themselves and each other, have to undergo a parallel transformation” (Weiss et al., 1992, p. 360). Restructuring and reculturing need to exist in concert with each other. Fullan (1993) described the process as a “complex dynamic that occurs between restructuring and reculturing” (p. 162). According to Fullan, in most restructuring reforms structure has attempted to push cultural change and the result has been mostly failure in achieving the goals that relate to improved teaching and student learning. What has been required is a reciprocal
relationship between restructuring and reculturing. However, Fullan argued that in some cases it may be more effective that normative changes serve as the driving force for structural changes. The implication is that it is more advantageous and meaningful to the change process that educators begin working together and then discover that school structures must be altered. If the opposite occurs, that is if individuals have attempted to find ways of working together while immersed in rapidly implementing new structures, the result often has been confusion, ambiguity, conflict, and possible retrenchment.

Reculturing, then, has contributed to personal and collective resilience in the face of change. It has helped people persist when they have encountered conflict or when things go wrong. Constructive reculturing means working collaboratively with people we do not like as well as people we do (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). Therefore, the anticipated outcomes of structural changes in authority and decision making in schools cannot be fully achieved without the accompanying fundamental changes in the personal and interpersonal behaviour of individuals in the learning community (Schlechty, 1991).

Site-Based Management

The reform initiative of site-based management essentially involves stakeholders in shared decision making. Because shared decision making requires collaborative skills (Hart, 1995; Hudson & Glomb, 1997; Mutchler & Dutweiler, 1990; Wood & Gray, 1991), some authors have suggested that the implementation of site-based management relies on effective collaboration (O'Shea & O'Shea, 1997). The goals of site-based management have encompassed all of the themes of reform described by Newmann (1993) including governance and management, changes in student learning experiences, teacher professionalism, and accountability. Because the purpose of this review is to
examine the significance of collaboration in contemporary school reform, the pervasive and inclusive nature of site-based management as a reform effort makes it a suitable choice for the study.

**Definition** Variations in terminology and in the implementation of site-based management have been a source of confusion. Different authors have used the terms site-based management (Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1990) and participatory management (Haskin, 1995) to describe the same reform initiative.

School-based management can be broadly defined as any arrangement in which the management of school affairs (budget, curriculum, discipline, policies, personnel) is conducted at local sites, rather than by central district offices. In participatory management school-level administrators share power with school staff and parents who participate in these decisions (Haskin, 1995, p. 5).

Malen, Ogawa, and Kranz (1990) described site-based management in a similar way but included the component of a formal decision making body such as a council or board in their definition.

All forms of site-based management have involved use of some form of decision making (Leithwood, 1997). Wood and Gray (1991) referred to shared decision making as participatory decision making and described it as “a collaborative approach in which superordinates and subordinates work together as equals to share and analyze problems together, generate and evaluate affirmatives and attempt to reach agreement or consensus on decisions” (p. 140).

Case studies of districts or schools implementing site-based management have indicated that the operation of this governance structure has been extremely varied. In
theory three areas of decision making can be decentralized to the school: budget, curriculum, and human resources (Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992). Within the diverse contexts of the implementation, there has been wide variation across programs in terms of the types of discussions and the extent of authority that has been decentralized.

As well as addressing different areas of decision making, site-based management has included three very specific forms or models (Murphy & Beck, 1995). In one governance model, community control, authority has been taken by parent and community groups. In a second model, administrative decentralization, teachers have formed the majority on site councils and have been empowered to engage in decision making formerly carried out by central administration. A third site-based management mode has featured principal control. Few studies have differentiated among these forms of decentralization, which has added to the confusion in understanding site-based management. As well research to date has suggested that each form of governance and decision making has faced different challenges and levels of success (Malen et al., 1990). Within the framework of collaboration, the uneven level of success of site-based management has supported the necessity of individuals working together towards clearly defined, mutually agreed upon goals.

A Global Phenomenon The thrust towards decentralization in education has been international in scope, including the countries of England and Wales, the United States, New Zealand, Australia, and Canada (Caldwell, 1997; Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1990). Although individual social and cultural contexts have shaped the exact nature of the reform in each country, similarities in the trends and initiatives for school reform in these Western nations have been apparent. At the heart of much of the devolution of authority
to the school site has been the encouragement of bottom-up improvements in school quality, a new responsiveness to community social values, democratic participation, and hopes for an educational renewal resulting from local ownership.

However internationally the trend toward site-based management has been accompanied by an increase in central control such as in the national curriculum requirements in England and Wales. Therefore while a common thread of school reform in many societies has been a decentralization of decision making in the form of site-based management, an equally common movement has been maintenance of an increased thrust toward system-wide standards, national coherence, and equity. Consequently, although schooling has become more centralized in some respects through the advancement of curriculum targets, learning outcomes, and standardized tests, the day-to-day management and responsibility for meeting the quality standards has been placed in the hands of the individual school. The resulting issue for shared decision making has become one of balancing control and autonomy in the delivery of public education. Practitioners have been well aware that there has been an unresolved tension between the policy framework for education that currently exists in Western nations and the policy desires and goals that have been part of the rhetoric of site-based management (Darling-Hammond, 1993; Goldring & Rollis, 1992). As a result teachers and administrators have received mixed signals or contradictory support from different levels of the policy system. Consequently, many site-based initiatives have suffered from inconsistent messages from local and district policy on subjects that have ranged from budgeting, curriculum, assessment, and teaching to student learning (Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992). Boyd (1992) concluded that a balancing of top-down and bottom-up approaches may require new paradigms of
educational policy as well as attention to a collaborative approach to educational improvement.

The Alberta Context  Given the locale for this study, restructuring in the province of Alberta serves as an example of contemporary reform and provides necessary background to this research. A study recently conducted by Spencer (1999) closely examined reform in public education in Western countries and revealed that “the state of public education in Alberta and the responses and reactions to issues of reform in this province mirror those of other Western Nations” (p. 200).

In Canada the province of Alberta launched its restructuring effort in 1994. Described as “the most comprehensive changes ever introduced in a provincial education system” (Barlow & Robertson, 1994, p. 219), the Three Year Business Plan (Alberta Education, 1994) introduced major fiscal and governance reforms to education. Based on the need for fiscal responsibility and on the premise that Albertans wanted to be involved in educational decision making, the implementation of site-based management and the introduction of school councils provided educational stakeholders more local control over schools (Aitken & Townsend, 1998).

In Alberta pressures for restructuring in education came from several different places. The business community stressed the need for improvement in education in order to compete in global economic markets. Within the private sector education costs were perceived to be contributing to the depressed state of the economy (Alberta Education, 1993). Thus in Alberta, as in other centres, the move towards site-based management appeared to be driven by financial as well as educational concerns. Therefore the Ministry of Education and administration viewed collaboration as a means of ensuring
institutional growth and program development that would meet the needs of all sectors amid the realities of shrinking resources (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Stewart, 1996).

Another theme underlining the reform movement in Alberta has been “school choice.” The province provided funding that followed the student, so that parents could send their children to the school of their choice. As well the provision for charter schools allowed interested groups to establish their own schools, independent of school board authority, but within provincial guidelines and funding.

As a result, schools have perceived the need to become more market conscious, more competitive for “clients,” and more preoccupied with public relations (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992). The institutional competitiveness has tended to divide schools and their teachers from one another. In these cases collaboration has not occurred between colleagues from different schools who have seen themselves in competition with each other for the same students. The opportunity to engage in learning with others beyond the teacher’s home community thus has been lost as has been the possibility for professional development (Darling-Hammond, 1995). According to Hargreaves (1995) an unintended consequence of site-based management has been that it has created huge gaps in the professional development at the local level. Decentralization, having removed bureaucracy, may also have decreased local support.

Achievement of the positive outcomes of collaboration may be related to the extent that a particular improvement initiative has embodied collaborative principles (Fullan, 1995; Hudson & Glomb, 1996; O'Shea & O'Shea, 1996). In the Alberta example, although the move to site-based management was based on the premise that the public wanted to be involved in educational decision making, essentially it was the
government that mandated the implementation of the initiative. Furthermore, the
government’s decision to restructure was based not only on educational accountability but
on financial concerns. Stewart (1996) stated “it is unlikely that motivation stemming from
financial concerns is enough to support true collaboration” (p. 21).

Shared decision making or governance initiatives may begin as an imposed
venture as it did in Alberta. However at some point in the process the initiative must
become voluntary in nature in order to be sustained (Christiansen et al., 1997). Also, as
Cook and Friend (1991) and Welch and Sheridan (1995) have indicated, in order to be
successful decision making and shared involvement should be strongly linked to clearly
defined and shared outcomes, goals, and purposes. Within the context of site-based
management funding issues at the individual school level have caused some schools to be
market conscious and competitive. Competition has been antithetical to collaboration
because it has divided rather than joined. The result has been that competition has
discouraged the promotion of shared goals in education and has isolated groups from
communicating with those who have held alternative perspectives. Within the context of
collaboration it has been the valuing of multiple perspectives that has resulted in growth
and strength (Fullan, 1998; Hudson & Glomb, 1997).

Another defining characteristic of collaboration has included the notion of
equality in relationships (Cook & Friend, 1991; Welch & Sheridan, 1995). Within the
reform initiatives in Alberta the location and exercise of power has clearly been an issue.
While the government has given autonomy to schools, it has maintained control at the
central level. Similarly at the individual school site-based management has called upon
principals to share authority, leadership, and decision making while also holding them accountable to policies determined outside the school community.

In summary, collaboration has been subject to individual variations, political mandates, and institutional regulations that have created considerable tensions which have threatened the process. However in describing the challenge of collaborative work Christensen, Eldredge, Ibom, Johnson and Thomas (1996) maintained that “even in the toughest of times, when collaboration tensions are most apparent, we would not choose to go back to the way things were” (p. 188). Similarly, despite the critique and concerns over site-based management most schools would not wish to return to previous, more centralized arrangements. In the report of a three year study on the views of head teachers Bullock and Thomas (1994) reported on the strong acceptance of local management in schools in England. Caldwell (1997) agreed that self-management is probably irreversible and has been consistent with developments and trends in other public and private sector organizations.

Implications for Stakeholders as Participants in Site-Based Management

A central ingredient in shared decision making or any other restructuring initiative has been the redesign of work for the major educational stakeholders (Bredeson, 1993). Site-based management has required new attitudes, skills, behaviours, and ways of being that are part of the process of collaboration (Stewart, 1996).

Fullan and Miles (1992) have noted that school reform has been most successful when it has involved cross-role groups of teachers, parents, students, and administrators in shared decision making. However new patterns of interaction and participation have placed heavy demands on the participants to work in different ways and to develop
additional skills. Substantial change in norms, roles, and relationships and in the system of beliefs and values that give meaning to these structures have presented an additional challenge to those who have been required to modify their own behaviour in response to these changes.

Renegotiating the roles of stakeholder groups has posed challenges in terms of authority and control. By implication school leadership has expanded to include teachers and parents as well as the principal. Teachers have been viewed as a source of expertise rather than as the implementers of others' ideas or plans for improvement of practice. Parents have become crucial stakeholders possessing knowledge, assets, and expertise about their children that are not available to anyone else. The principal has been identified as a key player in developing collaborative, participatory decision making as well as in maintaining the restructuring effort as a whole (Pristine, 1991; Leithwood, 1992).

Reshaping the Principalship

Although the literature on leadership has attested to the important role the principal plays in restructuring (Beck, 1994; Wheatly et al., 1997) there has been no consensus among practitioners, researchers, or policy makers as to the appropriate role of the principal in a restructured school (Hallinger & Hausman, 1994). Coming to an understanding of the attributes, processes, and skills that are a part of being collaborative has been an ongoing process for school leaders. To know and believe that collaboration has been required of leaders in order to work effectively within the school community has not in itself provided educators with the understanding of how they might change their own situation to produce greater collaboration. The structural, highly visible nature of the
reforms of site-based management and shared decision making have called for principals to behave differently although the appropriate role often has been difficult to describe.

The central role that the principal has played in building and developing school culture has been well documented in the literature (Sarason, 1971). The principal has been crucial in determining what is incorporated into the culture of the school. For the last two decades the majority of the studies concerning school change and reform have identified the principal as a key player (Fullan, 1985, 1991; Leithwood, 1992). In commenting on these findings Prestine (1994) observed that much of this research has been grounded in the traditional view of the principal that has been premised on the positional power of the principal in a hierarchical organization. Within this structural position the principal held the control and influence over school initiatives that was not available to others in the school. As a result of this positional authority and without the involvement of other school members as multifaceted contributors the principal became the decision maker in school change efforts. Traditional conceptions of the role of the principal from a positional perspective may have set limitations on conceptualizing the role of the principal within restructured schools and have been incongruent with contemporary research and thinking on leadership (Hickman, 1997; Kelley, 1995; Rost, 1991). Therefore while the role of the principal has continued to be acknowledged for its importance in the dynamic of school culture, a new image of the principal that has been more in keeping with new visions of schools has emerged. While the instructional leadership imagery of the 1980s highlighted the centrality of the principal's role, school restructuring has emphasized the diffuse nature of leadership (Hallinger & Hausman, 1994).
Redefining the Role  For schools to operate more as communities characterized by collaborative cultures Sergiovanni (1994) has called for new visions of leadership. As teachers have accepted responsibility for their own professional growth, they no longer have been dependent on the principal to plan and implement staff development for them. The role of the principal has become one of supporter, reinforcer, and facilitator. Rosenblum, Louis and Rossmiller, (1994) conducted case studies of eight high schools over a period of two years. They studied schools that had positive experiences enhancing teacher working conditions and examined the effect of such conditions on teacher and student engagement. The staff described their leaders using terms such as mentor, guide, facilitator, change agent, enabler, coach, and supporter - words that reflected the relationships that the principals had with staff. “Rarely were they referred to as decision maker” (p. 106). The case study and survey data from the eight restructured high schools indicated that the presence of strong leadership was an important factor that contributed to a sense of professionalism and high quality work for teachers. What was relevant to a new vision of leadership were the attributes that were considered to be a part of good leadership including collaboration, communication, feedback, influence, and professionalism.

Bredeson (1993) surveyed educators about changes in their professional work lives and reported similar findings. Bredeson found that restructuring was characterized by wider application of shared decision making, decentralized school-based management processes, and greater professional autonomy expressed in redefined roles, rules, relationships, and responsibilities. The focus of the study was on role strain. Bredeson concluded that as principals moved traditional, hierarchical school leadership to group-
centered leadership, the ability to listen, to deal with conflict, and to facilitate small and large group processes were these principals’ most important competencies. Working within the context of site-based management required the development of collaborative skills and strategies (Hudson & Glomb, 1997; Mutchler & Duttweiler, 1990; O’Shea & O’Shea, 1997; Roy, 1995; Welch, 1998).

Similarly, Haskin (1995) conducted three years of ethnographic research in four schools that implemented a school-based management program. The program was intended to alter the management structure of inner-city elementary schools in a midwestern city so that the adults in the building began to work together towards the common purpose of serving children’s needs. Haskin addressed the meaning of leadership in participatory management, specifically the role of the principal in the implementation of the program. Haskin used the term facilitative to characterize the most successful principals in the program. She described facilitative leaders as individuals who led rather than controlled but who maintained responsibility for decisions made in the school whether those decisions were made alone or as a team. Haskin concluded that successful implementation of site-based management began with the principal. She described the style of leadership required as facilitative, democratic, and collaborative. She noted that this style of leadership “runs counter to the training and experience of most administrators” (p. 33). Haskin found that the principal also needed to be effective. “Effective principals, those who follow through on decisions and demand performance from staff, appear to be more likely to successfully implement site-based management” (p. 21).
These studies provided useful descriptions of principal behaviour, skills, and attitudes that were pervasive in collaborative working environments. They also provided evolving metaphors of school leadership that appeared to fit the new context of working relationships.

**Leadership for Collaboration** Within the literature, various authors have used different terminology to describe the style of leadership associated with school-based management including transformational leadership (Leithwood, 1992), facilitative leadership (Cowley & Goldman, 1994; Haskin, 1999), and collaborative leadership (Telford, 1995). Schools with predominantly transformational leadership were purposeful and collaborative with a greater number of staff and faculty operating in an empowered and leaderlike manner. Transformational leadership emphasized the principal’s role in acknowledging and developing the leadership capacity of other individuals within the school community. A definition of facilitative leadership included “behaviours that enhance the collective ability of the school to adapt, solve problems, and improve performance” (Conley & Goldman, 1994) and leadership “manifested through someone, rather than over someone” (Goldman, Dunlop & Conley, 1993). Conley and Goldman (1994) said principals acted facilitatively when they overcame resource constraints, built teams, provided feedback, and solved conflict, created communication networks, practiced collaborative politics, and modeled the school’s vision. Finally Telford (1995) developed and defined the notion of collaborative leadership as one that was transformational and encompassed distinctive elements of collaboration. Using a synthesis of findings in the review of the literature on collaboration and the Bolman and Deal (1991) typology of structural, human resource, political, and symbolic frames, Telford developed an operational definition of
collaborative leadership in which four dominant factors (outside the Bolman and Deal typology) were apparent. They were "development of the educational potential of students, professional development of leaders, good organizational health, and institutionalization of vision" (p. 22).

Within all of these definitions that have described leadership for collaboration is the theme of a network of interconnected individuals working together collaboratively. The image of the principal according to Christensen (1992) has evolved to a conception of the leader as "one of many creative, caring, collaborative individuals in the school" (p. 18). Prestine (1991) based on her empirical work and analysis of the role of the principal in restructuring schools also concluded that the principal’s participation had to be as an equal. Therefore, Prestine’s conclusions on how the principal works with others are consistent with the definitional component of collaboration that has stressed equality in partnerships.

In summary, although leadership has continued to play a key role in school change, site-based management has placed new and different demands on principals. According to Haskin "not every principal can do it well" (p. 33). For many leaders in the old mold making the change in themselves might be their greatest personal challenge (Oakley & Krug, 1991). Principals who were recruited, trained, and rewarded for "running a tight ship" and always being in control must learn and relearn much if schools are to be led in a participatory way. Conversely there may be times in the life of some organizations when highly directive leadership may be both necessary and desirable at least for a period of time.
The principal’s role is only one element among many in the school’s social and environmental milieu that contributes to student learning. In restructuring schools parents have been asked to sit on governing bodies as equal partners with principals and teachers. **Parents**

The establishment of school councils with parent and community participation in advisory or decision making roles has been a component of site-based management (Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1990). Although there is a notable amount of literature which has asserted that parental participation has been an important component of effective schools (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1987), there has been little evidence to suggest that parental involvement in noninstructional areas such as school governance has had direct effects on student learning (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). In fact Hargreaves (1997) argued that the establishment of parent councils has been managerial in design and approach and has fostered the creation rather than the building of community. In his critique of school councils, Hargreaves added that the school council “grants untoward influence to atypical parents” (p. 19). Similarly, Barlow and Robertson (1994) asserted that school councils have tended to attract the most confident, articulate, and influential parents who have not necessarily represented the entire parent body. Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) also questioned the token participation of a select group of parents as nonrepresentative of the parent population.

Therefore, while recognizing that parent councils have been an important step in encouraging a sense of shared responsibility for student learning, Hargreaves (1997) suggested that authentic, casual, and informal relations between parents and educators may be more important in the process. Consistent with the views of other authors
Hargreaves emphasized that collaboration between parents and educators should include the components of open communication, trust, empathy, and risk-taking in order to achieve the mutually held goals of student learning. Furthermore when these values become established in the relationships with parents, they provide a foundation that supports the more pragmatic functions of shared decision making and school governance.

Recent initiatives for shared decision making and shared governance have assumed that parents have wanted more involvement and power within schools. In reality this may not be the case even though pressure exists within and outside the system to encourage parental involvement. With many countries mandating site-based councils involving parents the choice as whether to participate seems to have been removed. It is ironic that bottom-up decision making has been mandated in a top-down manner. When individuals feel coerced or pressured into collaboration rather than engaging in it voluntarily, the ultimate success of the initiative may be threatened. Therefore, although principals have needed to be active in promoting participation among parents, they have had to accomplish it in a way that has balanced expectations of the system and honored parental choice and willingness for involvement.

To become effective both parents and educators have needed to acquire new understandings and skills in their redesigned role relationships (Fullan, 1996; McPherson & Crowson, 1994; Malen & Ogawa, 1989). The implementation of site-based management in Chicago schools involved the community control model of governance in which authority was held by parent and community groups. McPherson and Crowson (1994) conducted a study with 15 principals who were part of the reform in Chicago.
schools. The principals were individuals who had been successful in both the old and new systems. Their descriptions of their work with the Local School Councils provided strong evidence of the need for parents also to learn the skills of working together collaboratively. Principals commented on the unsophisticated quality of their councils, reporting that they spent a great deal of time educating parents in the details, procedures, and nuances of educational governance. The findings of this study were similar to those of Malen and Ogawa (1988) who found that the change in parents' roles from involvement to governance had been difficult. Malen and Ogawa reported that parents often lacked information about activity and operation, had unclear understandings of their power, and were unwilling to express their preferences. In some cases parents were invited rather than elected to serve on councils and therefore felt indebted to school administrators. Malen and Ogawa concluded that school-based management created opportunities for parents to participate in school governance, but that effective decision making did not necessarily occur unless professional and parent influence relationships changed substantially.

The establishment of a school council as part of the model of site-based management has been one way in which parents have influenced decision making in the school. However, although such initiatives have established a sense of mutual responsibility for education amongst stakeholders, the concept of sharing held by participants has needed to go beyond the formalized structures of school councils and models for decision making (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Darling-Hammond, 1995; Hargreaves, 1997). Indeed, Hargreaves has suggested that personal collaborative relationships between parents and teachers have the greatest potential to have an impact
on student learning. Therefore a balancing of parent involvement and professionalism has involved a redefinition of school communities as successful parent-professional partnerships.

**Students**

Levin (1995) noted that while the literature on school-based management “advocates more important roles for teachers and parents …. students are usually omitted from the discussion” (p. 17). The absence of student voices is obvious in the literature on site-based management and shared decision making. When a student has been mentioned in the decision making process it has been in a high school setting. For example Austin and Nava (1994) described how the Ysleta (Texas) Independent School District successfully used collaboration to promote effective change. Within the district, the authors described the formation of student advisory committees at the high school level that met regularly with the superintendent and principal to discuss concerns and upcoming events. Students also participated in the selection process for new administrators and counselors.

Townsend (1994) conducted research in Australia that looked at differences in the way principals, teachers, parents, and students viewed the goals of effective schooling. Townsend noted a comparatively low correlation between students’ responses and those of other stakeholders. Townsend interpreted this discrepancy as an indication of an increased need to strengthen the role that students play in decision making forums. His recommendations were that schools incorporate more opportunities for students to voice their concerns.
Several reasons have been put forth to account for the lack of involvement of students in school improvement. Involving students in decision making has not traditionally been a part of the culture of schools. Power relations between students and educators have caused adults to be reluctant to admit that students might have something to say about their own learning. The defensive position on the part of teachers has been based on the belief that students are not capable or competent in making judgments about matters related to teaching and learning. The traditional exclusion of young people from the consultative process may be founded on an out-dated view of childhood that has not recognized or honored children's capacity to reflect on issues affecting their lives (Rudduck, Day, & Wallace, 1997). While teachers have the opportunity to collaborate with each other concerning significant changes in their practice or approach, they do not do the same for students whose ways of learning are also affected by the planned change. When the purposes and characteristics of new teaching and learning approaches are not shared with students, they may escape from the ambiguity of the situation by moving back to old ways in the regular classroom routines. In this situation the importance of including students in the dialogue becomes obvious, as students have the power to jeopardize change and force the teacher to step back from the innovation as well.

Site-based management has provided a forum for the students' voices to be heard in offering input into decisions that impact their learning. Corbett and Wilson (1995) argued that in examining students and reform the best methodology for inquiry into students perceptions, attitudes, and feelings would be a qualitative approach. This would involve talking to students in settings where they might express their experiences freely and openly (p. 16). Although there is evidence of student involvement at the high school
level, there still needs to be considerable dialogue among educators, parents, and students in order to come to a sense of how students can play a role in influencing the decision making process. For many individuals this will involve developing and coming to new understandings and norms about relationships in the school. The barriers to student participation in governance at the high school level are even more pervasive at the elementary school because of the younger age of the students. Although children in elementary schools have always had opportunities to influence both their teachers and parents in an informal way, the manner in which this might be formalized in schools has not been studied at this point in time. Rudduck, Day, and Wallace (1997) maintained that the concern with voice has considerable significance for the role that students should play in restructuring and reform.

**Teachers**

Within the context of contemporary reform the research has described teachers as problem solvers, change agents, and collaborators (Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster & Cobb, 1995; Fullan, 1993). Whether as a member of the decision making team or working with colleagues and parents in the school, the teacher’s role has changed and expanded. Therefore teachers’ participation in decision making in the school has called for a redefinition of teacher professionalism that has included an extension and enrichment of the teacher’s role (Caldwell, 1999).

Site-based management has provided the opportunity for teachers to redefine professional norms, reduce their isolation, coordinate their teaching practice, and improve student learning. However to achieve these positive outcomes, teachers have needed to be involved in decisions that they have cared about passionately. Accordingly teachers’
involvement in decision making should focus on instructional issues so that teachers’
time and energy are not given to issues pertinent to the management and administration of
the entire school. Research that has examined teacher participation in school decision
making has indicated no changes in teacher practice as a result of being involved in
shared decision making at the school (Griffin, 1995; Taylor & Teddlie, 1992; Weiss,
Cambone, & Wyeth, 1992). In fact, when asked about their participation in shared
decision making, teachers have reported being overtaxed and feeling that their
participation has been at the expense of their ability to perform their classroom teaching
adequately (Spencer, 1999, p. 171).

According to Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) what has been necessary
in involving teachers in decision making roles and responsibilities has been the provision
of opportunity and structures that have encouraged the development of professional
discourse communities beyond the isolation of classrooms. For teachers this has required
learning the skills needed to work in collaborative ways as well as understanding the
perspectives needed in teaching for complex thought. Therefore site-based management
that involves teachers in making decisions that are central to their conceptions of what
teaching and learning are about may result in the desired positive outcomes in student
learning.

The Relationship between Collaboration and Power

Involving any stakeholder group in the leadership and management of the school
poses a variety of challenges. In particular renegotiating the roles of stakeholders has
created issues for participants in terms of authority and control. Restructuring has
involved not only a redefinition of roles and relationships in schools but also a
redistribution of power (Bauch & Goldring, 1998). The definition of collaboration used in this paper incorporates the notion of equality in relationships (Cook & Friend, 1991). However, the literature has acknowledged the tension that can be created within the context of shifting power and relationships between teachers and administrators in deciding the extent of teacher participation and the delineation of who makes what decision (Hallinger & Hausman, 1994; Schlechty, 1991). Moreover although site-based management has required principals to share authority and decision making, at the same time central authorities have imposed a degree of constraint and external control. Bauch and Goldring (1998) have cautioned that intensifying parental involvement and raising the professionalism and power of educators may introduce a potential conflict in the social interaction of parents and teachers.

Collaborative initiatives such as site-based management have involved participants in the complex dynamics of shifting power relationships in adopting new roles in decision making. Research that focuses on asking participants to describe and explain how decisions are made, on how conflict is resolved in their collaborative relationship, and on how the principal influences collaborative interaction may foster an understanding of how power is negotiated, shared, and balanced in collaboration.

**Summary**

Predictions for school reform for the 21st century have reflected a need for participants to gain further understanding of what might be meant by collaboration (Fullan, 1993; Little, 1990; Welch, 1998) and to achieve effective collaboration processes (Hudson & Glomb, 1997; O'Shea & O'Shea, 1997). Furthermore, the call for increased knowledge and skills of collaboration is consistent with research that has described the
significant nature of collaboration in contemporary school reform (Cook & Friend, 1992; Fullan, 1993; O'Shea & O'Shea, 1997).

Because lack of understanding of how to collaborate effectively with peers may contribute to teachers' feelings of isolation (Little, 1987), qualitative research that examines and describes participant experiences of collaboration could help teachers understand collaboration and thus achieve greater support and satisfaction in their work. Fullan (1991) has agreed with a phenomenological approach to research in education and emphasized the importance of seeking understandings about reality from the perspectives of the people involved in reform implementations.

Decisions to implement or facilitate collaboration in the school are more likely to be effective when administrators are informed by theoretical understanding of the phenomenon. Although definitions of collaboration abound in the literature, researchers have continued to call for "more sophisticated theorizing about the attributes of collegiality" (Timperley & Robinson, 1998, p. 608). Therefore, by examining a broad range of stakeholder perspectives on collaboration, principals may gain an increased understanding of the process and of the potential of collaboration in school improvement initiatives. Shared decision making, mentorship, team teaching assignments, and the functioning of school improvement groups could be more effective if organized and based upon recommendations derived from a study of participants' understandings of the process.

Also inherent within the need for participants to achieve effective collaborative processes is the development of the skills required to engage in that process. Descriptive research that studies collaboration by examining the perspectives of individuals who have
worked in collaborative ways may identify skills and abilities required for successful collaboration. Such research may guide staff development at the school and district level.

In conclusion collaboration and school reform are current social-political issues that affect many individuals, schools, and school districts. The demands of school reform require stakeholders to develop understandings, attitudes, skills, and policies that enable them to engage in professional learning through involvement with each other and consequently to connect that joint work, or collaboration, to positive educational change. “A twenty-first-century perspective predicting the integration of collaboration and school reform may help to guide future teaching, research, and service efforts” (O’Shea & O’Shea, 1997, p. 449). Commitment to the human aspects of the educational enterprise – the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of teachers, administrators, parents, and community members – is crucial to the process of collaboration and educational reform (Schlechty, 1991).
Chapter 3 - Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter I begin with an overview of the research paradigm applied to this study that incorporates the following descriptions of qualitative inquiry: inductive, naturalistic, phenomenological, and dynamic. Next I describe the design of the focus group methodology that shaped my study. I also explain site selection and entry, and my sampling techniques including the selection of participants. Then I outline my role as researcher in the study. Finally I discuss data collection, analysis, and the writing process.

A Qualitative Study

The term methodology refers to the "way in which we approach problems and seek answers" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 3). My research interest was to come to a better understanding of collaboration. I chose to approach the problem by examining participant perspectives (i.e., teacher, parent, principal and assistant principal), experiences, and understandings of collaboration. The research emphasis on perspectives brings together attributes, opinions, and experience in an effort to find out not only what participants think about collaboration but also how they think about it and why they think the way they do (Morgan, 1997). In approaching the problem in this way, I understood that a research problem is solved not by changing anything in the world but by learning more about something or understanding it better (Booth, Colomb, & Williams 1995, p. 51). Specifically the intent of the research was to study collaboration by gaining insight into the lived experiences of participants who have been engaged in the process through school improvement initiatives. The purpose of my research then and my approach are
typical of the assumptions of qualitative research and its goal of “understanding people from their own frames of reference and experiencing reality as they experience it” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 7). Because I was searching for a deeper understanding of stakeholders’ lived experience of collaboration as they viewed it, I decided that a qualitative research approach was the most appropriate means of addressing the problem. Therefore in my research, qualitative methodology was more than a set of data-gathering techniques; it was a way of approaching the empirical world (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

**Inductive**

In its qualitative approach my research emphasized several theoretical perspectives that Patton (1990) called “themes of qualitative inquiry” (p. 39). First, my research was highly inductive in that I was interested in developing insights about collaboration from “patterns in the data, rather than collecting data to assess preconceived models, hypotheses, or theories” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 7). Although the literature review on collaboration for this study did provide for content validity in the focus group interview questions, the open-ended nature of the questions permitted the participants to describe what was meaningful and salient to them without being “pigeonholed” (Patton, 1990, p. 46) into standardized categories. Furthermore in keeping with the strategy of inductive design I did not provide the participants with any kind of universal or researcher definition of collaboration. In fact because I was interested in building an interpretation based upon the details that emerged in the data rather than presupposing in advance what the important dimensions would be (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Patton, 1990), it was not necessary or desirable for the participants either to work from or to hold to the same definition of collaboration in order to illuminate the topic. In sum, I did not want to
control or manipulate my research and saw my investigative challenge as an inductive one.

However, because it was important for participants to have something to say about the topic, several design elements of my study provided the context for participants to feel comfortable and confident in discussing the topic in their own terms. A purposeful sampling technique (Patton, 1990) ensured that all participants had experience with the topic. (This will be explained further under sample.) As well in the introduction to the first interview (Appendix C) I reassured the participants of their expertise and background with respect to the topic and their possible contribution to the discussion based on their personal experiences and understandings. As Marshall and Rossman (1995) explained, the most important aspect of the interviewer’s approach concerns conveying an attitude of acceptance that the participant’s information is valuable and useful. Finally the wording of my questions was a crucial consideration in ensuring that I gathered information that was helpful to my study (Merriam, 1988). In particular I tried to construct the questions so that they were open-ended and presupposed (Patton, 1990) that the people being interviewed had something to say about the topic. For example my opening question for the first interview that asked participants “to think back to a personal experience with collaboration and describe that experience to us” presupposed that collaboration had occurred. I asked directly for description rather than asking for an affirmation of the existence of the phenomenon in question. According to Patton (1990) by presupposing that the person being interviewed does indeed have something to say, the quality of the description may be enhanced. Participants had no difficulty in relying on and explaining their own understandings of collaboration.
Similarly Riordon (1996) studied collaboration amongst high school teachers by "tapping practitioner wisdom" (p. 40). Riordon explained that "teachers who collaborate are arguably the experts on their collaboration" (p. 41).

Qualitative researchers do operate within theoretical frameworks because as Taylor and Bogdan (1998) have cautioned "pure induction is impossible" (p. 8). Indeed the definition of collaboration used in this study, derived from reputable empirical studies, provides a framework for understanding collaboration and also preserves the benefits of rich descriptive accounts of participant perspectives of collaboration. Definitions, especially those related to collaboration, will be modified during the process of the study based upon the data that emerges. The conceptualization of the phenomenon under study is understood to be an iterative process. Taylor and Bogdan's (1988) advice "to make sure the theory fits the data and not vice versa" (p. 8) was my ultimate goal in maintaining the inductive design of a qualitative methodologist.

Naturalistic

Because I was studying participant perspectives on collaboration as a facet of their lived experience and personal lives, I understood my focus group interview project to be a naturalistic study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although Marshall and Rossman (1995) described studying participants in a natural, real-life atmosphere (neither experimental nor the strain and artificiality of a one-on-one interview) as an advantage to focus group methodology, Morgan (1997) argued that the researcher's efforts to create and direct the groups makes them less natural than participant observation methods. Although attempting to interact with participants in a natural and an obtrusive manner I was unable to "blend into the woodwork" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 8) as a participant observer,
but I did model the interviews after a normal conversation rather than a formal question-and-answer pattern. Furthermore my inductive, discovery-oriented approach fits the description of naturalistic inquiry in that unlike experimental research in which, ideally, the investigator attempts to completely control conditions of the study, (Patton, 1990) I was open to whatever emerged in the words of the participants, my prime source of data (Lofland & Lofland, 1995).

Phenomenological

My qualitative approach was a phenomenological attempt to understand collaboration based upon participants' experience of the phenomenon and the resultant meaning that they constructed of the event as result of that experience. The phenomenologist attempts to see things from other people's points of view (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). To accomplish this I relied on description – what participants said and the multiple realities of their stories – as evidence of how meaning was constructed by them. The participants' description formed the content of the focus group interviews and became the main research data. As a qualitative researcher concerned about the accuracy of my data collection, I used a tape recorder to audio-tape participants' comments. My procedures are explained in the section on data collection. This "thick" or "rich" description (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) was important because it had the potential to provide "depth, detail, and meaning at a personal level of experience" (Patton, 1990, p. 18) which was appropriate given the purpose of my study-to document and analyze participant perspectives on collaboration.
Dynamic

My study incorporated a dynamic, developmental perspective in which the process of discovery helped to shape the research. This does not mean that I did not have ideas for design and general guiding questions in place when I began the research (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Rather within the recursive, reiterative, and interactive nature of qualitative research I remained flexible, “anticipated the likelihood of the unanticipated and was prepared to go with the flow of change (Patton, 1996, p. 53).

In summary, my research included the following underpinnings of qualitative research: openness through inductive analysis, real-world connections through naturalistic inquiry, contextual sensitivity of fieldwork and personal contact, and attention to dynamic processes. Patton (1990) termed these the basic theoretical perspectives themes of qualitative inquiry but also cautioned that “these are not absolute characteristics of qualitative inquiry, but rather strategic ideals that provide a direction and framework for developing specific designs and concrete data collection tactics” (p. 59). Thus while staying true to the strategies of qualitative inquiry, I recognized that in practice implementing naturalistic inquiry is always a matter of degree (Patton, 1990). In attempting to understand the real world, my approach involved moving back and forth between “induction and deduction, between experience and reflection on experience, and between greater degrees and lesser degrees of naturalistic inquiry” (Patton, 1999, p. 60).

Design

In terms of research design, my project is a self-contained focus group study. A focus group engages in “a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (Krueger, 1998,
The key distinguishing feature of a self-contained focus group is that the results of the research can stand on their own (Morgan, 1997). As Marshall and Rossman stated “when interviews are used as the sole way of gathering data...the subjective view is what matters. Studies making more objective assumptions would triangulate interview data with data gathered through other methods” (p. 81). However in studies such as this one in which focus groups serve as the primary means of gathering data, Morgan (1997) cautioned that there must be “a careful matching of the goals of the research with the data that the focus group can produce to meet these goals” (p. 3). The goal of focus groups methodology is to find out as much as possible about participants’ experience and feelings on a given topic (Morgan & Krueger, 1993). This goal then is in keeping with both the qualitative research approach that searches for a deeper understanding of participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 1995) and the purpose of this study which is to provide insight into stakeholder perspectives on collaboration. Therefore this study uses focus group methodology as a principal source of data or as a self-contained method.

The attributes of focus group studies which are consistent with this study include: reporting a broad spectrum of respondents' perspectives rather than the in-depth and detailed opinions of any given participant – “a polyphonic account” (Frey & Fontana, 1993, p. 26); the researcher as moderator or interviewer is familiar and comfortable with group processes and with communication theory and research which may enhance the management and interpretation of the research (Morgan, 1993); studying participants in a natural setting (Marshall & Rossman 1995); a socially oriented research design in which
data derives from the individuals that make up the group and the dynamics of the group as a whole. (Morgan, 1997).

The choice of focus group methodology for this study is based on the need for future research to consider collaboration as the primary focus of the study. A review of the literature on collaboration indicated that several studies have examined collaboration as an adjunct to, or process involved in, some other research topic. Focus group design allows the researcher to direct the topic to be studied and to select participants who best may respond to the research questions posed on the topic. The strength of relying on the researcher’s focus is the ability to produce concentrated amounts of data on precisely the topic of interest. However this control may also be a disadvantage as mentioned earlier in that it means that focus groups are unnatural social settings (Morgan, 1997). In particular there is the concern that the researcher, in the name of maintaining the focus, will influence the groups’ interactions. However it could be argued that the intrusion or presence of the researcher in any situation has an impact on the degree to which one might call the setting naturalistic (Morgan, 1997). The researcher’s influence on the data is an issue in almost all qualitative research. Because of this I was constantly aware and reflective about how what I am can shape and enrich what I do (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). As Patton (1990) advised, “the validity and reliability of qualitative data depend to a great extent on the methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher” (p. 11).

Although the focus group interview was a suitable and viable approach to my study because of its potential to provide a level of data gathering and a perspective on the research problem not available through individual interviewing, I was aware of disadvantages or problems in the methodology. As Fontana and Frey (1994) explained:
The emerging group culture may interfere with individual expression, the group may be dominated by one person, the group format makes it difficult to research sensitive topics, "group think" is a possible outcome, and the requirement for interviewer skills are greater because of group dynamics. (p. 365)

Morgan (1993, 1997, 1998) in his extensive use of, and theoretical writing about, focus group methodology as a form of qualitative research placed focus group interviews in an intermediary position between participant observation which typically occurs in groups and in-depth interviewing which usually occurs with individuals. Although Morgan (1997) agreed that focus groups provide access to forms of data that are not obtained easily with either of the other two methods, he also cautioned about the importance of understanding the strengths and weaknesses of focus groups in comparison to other qualitative methods.

According to Taylor and Bogdan (1998) every research design has its strong points and drawbacks. As a researcher my awareness of the problems involved in focus group methodology enabled me to prepare for and respond to its limitations by taking account of them in my research. Later in this section I describe how I addressed some of the issues related to the dynamics of the group interviews.

Finally I chose a focus group design for my study based upon my research interest and the belief that participants could actively and easily discuss my topic (Morgan, 1997). There were minimal risks to participants. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) advised that "group interviews seem most appropriate when the researcher has specific topics to explore and is not interested in private aspects of people's lives" (p. 115). Practical constraints faced by the researcher are also important to consider in choosing a research design (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Because I conducted my research while working full time as a school
based administrator I was unable to leave my position to work for an extended period of
time in the field as a participant observer. Fortunately my research interest did not lend
itself to that type of inquiry. Focus group design allowed me to make the most efficient
use of my limited time and also to obtain the maximum amount of quality data. This does
not mean that my focus group study was uniformly easier to accomplish than gathering
the equivalent amount of data with individual interviews. Logistical problems that I
encountered in the process are discussed in the data collection section.

Site and Entry

The study was conducted in a large school district in Western Canada. Participants were sought from a possible twenty elementary schools that are part of one of
the decentralized, geographically designated learning communities in the district. As a
school based administrator in one of the elementary schools, I did not seek participants from my own setting. However my connection to the learning community did facilitate entry as well as the identification of participants for the study. Of the 16 participants in
the study, 13 were from 11 of the 20 elementary schools in the designated area with three
participants from other geographical locations in the district. My experience reinforced
Lofland and Lofland's (1995) suggestion that "gaining entry to a setting or getting
permission to do an interview is greatly expedited if you have connections" (p. 37)
proved to be accurate. It was not my intention to study a particular school setting or the
learning community itself. Rather my association with the district provided me with a
"way in" so that I could then seek information from that particular decentralized group of
schools in order to conduct my research. According to Lofland and Lofland (1995) "it
seems quite natural for outside researchers to gain access to settings or persons through
contacts they have already established” (p. 38). Because the theoretical interest driving this research was not linked specifically to a school or the district organization, I selected a conference area for the interviews in a “neutral” site that is part of the facility organization in the district. In choosing the location for the interviews I considered the needs of the participants and myself. From the researcher’s point of view my primary concerns were the ability to hold a discussion and capture data. For the participants some of the main concerns related to convenience, comfort, and issues of confidentiality around their participation in the study.

**Sampling/Participants**

In this section I describe how I selected participants for the study - my sampling technique. Next details pertaining to the size of the sample are presented. Also included is a description of the procedures that I employed in the selection of participants.

Participants were identified using a purposeful sampling technique (Patton, 1990). “The purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (Patton, 1990, p. 169). I employed this technique because it is essential in focus group methodology that the participants have experience with the researcher’s topic and consequently are able to assist the researcher in addressing the research questions. Morgan and Krueger (1993) cautioned that a mismatch with the researcher’s interest occurs most often when participants have too little involvement in the topic. Therefore because the sampling for focus groups typically involves bringing together people of similar backgrounds and experiences (Patton, 1990), the selection criteria for the study required that stakeholders (principals, assistant/vice principals, teachers, and parents) had been involved in school improvement initiatives at their
school. As defined in Chapter 1, school improvement includes such initiatives as site-based management, school councils, shared decision making, and teacher professionalism. Teacher professionalism has several different meanings in the literature including: a greater participation in decision making (Weiss, Cambone & Wyeth, 1992), development of a stronger knowledge base for teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1995; McLaughlin, 1997), and teacher-to-teacher collaboration (Hargreaves, 1994). However because student perspectives usually have not been included in the literature on school improvement (Corbett & Wilson, 1995; Levin, 1995; Ruddick, Day, & Wallace, 1997) due to lack of participation in decision making at the elementary school level, students were not included in this study. Although the concern with voice has considerable significance for the role that students should play in school reform (Corbett & Wilson, 1995; Townsend, 1994), their involvement would not have fit within the design criteria for this study.

Accordingly, all school based administrators as key stakeholders in the school improvement planning process that is mandated in this district were potential participants in the study. Also, because all schools in the district are required to have a school council, I was able to draw from the “pool” of school council chairpersons in the area in order to recruit parent involvement in the study. As well, I sought the assistance of administrators (principals and assistant principals) in identifying teachers who might be candidates for participation. Building a pool of informants in this way is called snowball or chain sampling (Patton, 1990; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) and essentially involves getting to know some informants and having them introduce you to others. “By asking a number of people who else to talk with, the snowball gets bigger and bigger as you accumulate
new information-rich cases” (Patton, 1990, p. 76). Knowing the organizational structure, key personnel, and general culture of the school district in which the participants worked and lived saved time and helped with my organization and understanding of the study.

Sample Size

Sixteen participants were considered adequate for the study (four individuals in each role), allowing for four focus groups each consisting of four members. The following three considerations guided the sample size. First, the criteria that I used to select participants were expected to ensure that the participants had sufficient experience with collaboration to be able to provide the necessary data. As Morgan (1997) mentioned “the amount that each participant has to contribute to a group is a major factor in decisions about group size” (p. 42).

Second, although Patton (1990) suggested groups of five to eight people for focus groups interviews, Morgan (1997) indicated that small groups work best when the participants are likely to be both interested in the topic and respectful of each other. Further I was interested in obtaining a clear sense of each participant’s reaction to the topic and a smaller group would give each participant more time to talk. Finally given the amount of qualitative data that would be generated from the focus group interviews – a typical two hour session yields an average of 40-50 transcript pages (Knodel, 1993), I decided that more than sixteen participants would make data analysis too cumbersome.

Selection of Participants

When my study received ethical approval from the university and the school district, I began to think about how I would recruit participants for the research. I understood that setting up effective contact and recruitment procedures requires a careful
planning effort and considerable foresight (Morgan, 1998). Working within a limited
timeline, I hoped to conduct the research over a period of four months from March
through June, 2000.

My first meeting with potential participants occurred in early March when I was
given the opportunity to speak to principals in the area at their monthly meeting. At this
time I briefly described the research and what involvement in the study might mean for
them. I left them with a participation sheet (Appendix A) which would enable me to
follow up this initial contact with them with individual phone calls and more information
about the study. I hoped that some principals would leave the information with me at the
end of the meeting or would forward it to me over the next week. Although I did not
receive any participation sheets at the end of the meeting, one principal expressed a
willingness to participate, and signed the Consent for Participation forms immediately.

During the next week I sent an introductory letter to the school chairpersons in
each of the 20 elementary schools in the area (Appendix B) hoping to recruit parental
involvement in this way. In the letter, I indicated that I would like to follow-up the next
week with a call to talk more about the research. I felt that the introductory letter was a
courteous way to approach people that I didn’t know. Also it would give them some time
to consider the possibility of participating and to think about questions they might want to
ask. Throughout these initial contacts with possible informants, I followed Morgan’s
(1998) advice in trying to make the contacts personal and pleasant remembering that “it is
the beginning of the person-to-person interaction that is at the heart of focus groups” (p.110).
In the last week of March, I began to make telephone calls to principals, assistant principals, and teachers with the hope that a personal one-to-one conversation with them might encourage them to participate. I considered several factors in deciding who to call including the need for diversity in my sample (school size, experience, gender) as well as acquaintanceship.

**Acquaintanceship** As Morgan (1997) indicated, the issue of acquaintanceship is unavoidable when conducting focus group interviews in organizations. Acquaintanceship relates to the extent that I previously knew or was acquainted with participants before the study and whether they in turn knew each other. As a long time employee of the school district and an assistant principal in one of the schools in the designated community from which I recruited participants, I was acquainted with all of the principals, assistant principals and teachers in the study. However my personal association with all of them is best described by the word acquaintance which means “a person one knows slightly” (Oxford Reference Dictionary, 1988). I had never worked with any of them as a colleague in the same setting; we had not worked together on committees; nor were any of us close personal friends. However it could be speculated that their desire to be a part of this research project was in part due to our acquaintance because I tried “to use and/or build upon preexisting relations of trust to remove barriers to entrance” (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 38). For example my membership in the assistant principal group within the community may have resulted in those administrators being particularly interested and curious about the project resulting in their willingness to be involved. Building and developing the trust between the respondents and myself was a central tenet to my inquiry. Accordingly I attempted to maintain a professional distance during the
interviews by not conducting myself any differently with participants that I knew and those with whom I was not acquainted. I had never met any of the parents before the study. In terms of participants, I did not sense more than a casual acquaintance between several based upon introductions and conversations that took place before and after the interviews. Therefore although there was an element of familiarity, there was not a closeness or sense of knowing each other well that in turn might have affected how people acted or what they said around each other (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Also the composition of the focus groups was limited to having only one participant from a particular school in any focus group. This allowed participants to discuss the topic comfortably and maintain confidentiality.

**Contact Script** When I contacted the potential participants it was useful for me to know what I would say, and to have thought through various questions that I might encounter. I felt it also was important for everyone to receive a consistent amount of information. In order to ensure uniformity in how the study was explained I prepared and followed a contact script (Morgan, 1998) which contained key information that I wanted to share with each person (Appendix C). I found that some individuals tried to engage me in conversation about the topic. Rather than trying to discuss the topic over the telephone and to ensure that they all “started from the same place” (Morgan, 1998, p. 97) I gave everyone the message that they had experience and a point of view that was important to the research project. Both in the preliminary contact and in the follow-up letter confirming their participation (Appendix D), I tried to convey a sense that the research would be interesting and worthwhile.
My recruitment resulted in 14 participants (two principals, three teachers, four assistant principals and five parents) from one community in the district, and three participants (two principals, and one teacher) from other areas. Although I had originally intended to have only four participants in each role, I was most pleased with the response from parents to the research. There were eight parents who expressed interest in the study, but the logistics of scheduling made it possible for only five to be involved. I remained flexible to having the voice of an additional parent in one of the focus groups. Unfortunately one of the assistant principals was unable to participate in the study and therefore the total sample remained at my original projection of 16. Specific information about the participants has been included in Chapter 4.

As mentioned earlier, because the intent of my study was not to study a specific setting, I was open to recruiting participants from the district at large. Although “my home community” gave me entry and a place to start, the snowball sampling process of asking people I had already recruited for the names of other potential participants (Morgan, 1998) was a successful technique both within the community and at a larger district level.

The Role of the Researcher

Because the researcher is the instrument in qualitative inquiry (Patton, 1990), there is agreement in the literature that the relationship and rapport that develop between participants and researcher is of prime importance not only to the quality of the data but to the effect of the process on the participants (Morgan, 1998; Stainback & Stainback, 1988; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Because I was concerned about the meaningfulness of the data and of the study to participants, I was aware that every contact that I had with
participants from the beginning—whether it was by letter, telephone, or face-to-face—was instrumental in building the relationship with them (Morgan, 1998). In my interactions with participants before and during the interviews I followed some of the behavioural suggestions offered by experienced researchers such as Morgan (1998) and Stainback and Stainback (1988). For example, I built support with participants by talking informally with them before and after the interviews. Following Krueger’s (1998) suggestion, I used “purposeful small talk” (p. 20) which avoided the focused issue and instead concentrated on common human experiences such as the weather, children, and sports. I searched for points of commonality in our experiences in order to establish relationships by building on common ground between us. Because I expected that there might be some apprehension on the part of the participants, my goal was to put them at ease and establish rapport in the short time that I had available.

Krueger (1998) noted that talented moderators are truly interested in people and that it is the responsibility of the moderator to learn from the wisdom of others. Similarly Patton (1990) stated that to be a good interviewer you must like doing it. Patton further explained that “this means taking an interest in what people have to say. You must yourself believe that the thoughts and experiences of the people being interviewed are worth knowing” (p. 357). With this mind-set and approach I adopted the role of interested learner (Lofland & Lofland, 1995): “Since you are seeking to learn, it makes sense to act accordingly; the know-it-all or expert is not likely to be taught” (p. 40). The learner’s perspective encouraged me to reflect on all aspects of research procedures and establishing a particular type of interaction with participants. Accordingly, I presented myself to participants as a peer who was anxious to learn from them with no intent to
evaluate their experiences or opinions. Although I presented as a learner, my organization for the interviews and the guide that I followed accommodated Lofland and Lofland’s (1995) caution “that you do need to appear competent” (p. 40).

The Moderator

The role of the moderator has received much attention by researchers who have conducted and written about focus group methodology (Frey & Fontana, 1994; Morgan & Krueger, 1993; Krueger 1998; Morgan, 1997; 1998). In fact, Frey and Fontana (1994) described the role as one of the problems or disadvantages of focus group interviews. “The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone’s mind” (Patton, 1990, p. 278). To accomplish this goal in focus groups the researcher assumes the role of moderator rather than interviewer. The title of moderator highlights this role’s orientation toward helping out someone else’s discussion (Morgan, 1999). While facilitating the group discussion the researcher also must keep the talk focused on the research topic. The moderator must strive to create an open and permissive atmosphere in which each person feels free to share his or her point of view (Morgan & Krueger, 1993) but also must be sensitive to group dynamics (Frey & Fontana, 1994). Because of the skills, experience, communication competency, and style of facilitating group interaction required by moderators of focus groups, Fontana and Frey (1994) have gone so far as to say that only a few researchers will have the sensitivity to group processes that will make them eligible to conduct group interviews since social scientists are not routinely “trained” in interviewing in their graduate school experiences. (p. 33)

Although I am not an expert in communication theory and group skills my personal background has included graduate study in communication theory and practice
as well as interviewing. As well my background in the implementation of inservice and the facilitation of the group process in professional development activities at the university, school, and district levels provided considerable experience that I was able to bring to my role in this study.

I was also aware that as a researcher my own experiences were potentially both a "resource" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) and a biasing influence in my study. Researcher bias is selection of data that fit the researcher's existing theory or preconceptions, and selection of data that "stand out" to the researcher (Maxwell, 1996). The best way to deal with this is to explain biases and how you will deal with them. My preconceptions had been formed on the basis of reading of the literature on collaboration, the pilot test of a focus group interview, and reflections on over 20 years of teaching and administrative experience. Although I had completed an extensive review of the literature on collaboration, I did not enter into the research with an a priori theory of collaboration. First, I understood that by the very nature of qualitative research, such theory could not be predetermined. It is impossible to know ahead of time what is going to be found. The categories of description I discovered came from the sample of participants I interviewed and were determined by the data acquired from them. Second, the literature on collaboration has suffered from a lack of conceptual clarity (Little, 1990). My interest was to come to understand collaboration based on how participants experienced the phenomenon. The participants' understandings, not the researcher's prior theories, informed the findings of this study although it is granted that these understandings are still filtered and interpreted by the researcher (Merriam, 1988). It is undeniable that there are certain underlying assumptions that have provided me with a perspective on my work.
As a result my field notes include my continual reflections about how my “self” might be shaping my research and what I do. Techniques for ensuring that the findings reflected the participants’ understandings are detailed later in this chapter in the section that examines the strategies employed for ensuring the trustworthiness of the study.

Finally in my role as researcher I considered how my influence on the setting or individuals studied might affect the quality of the data – called reactivity (Patton, 1990, p. 473). Morgan (1997) cautioned that there is a concern that the moderator in attempting to maintain the interview’s focus will influence the interactions. Although I took great care not to lead the participants towards certain statements or conclusions, I chose the topics for discussion and somewhat directed the course of the interview. A standard set of questions (Appendix B) guided me through the interview sessions; however the questions were designed to be open-ended allowing me to probe for in-depth information. In fact because I was careful not to let the questions supersede what the participants had to say, I did not always ask all of the prepared questions. Analysis of the transcripts shows that, as is often the case in focus group interviews, participants frequently “took ownership of the interview” by sharing and comparing their ideas and experiences. As a result as Madriz (2000) argued the multi-vocality of the participants limits the control of the moderator who in fact has less power over a group than over a single individual. My questions often resulted in participants responding to each other, providing agreement and disagreement, asking questions of each other and then giving answers. Madriz (2000) described the “vertical interaction” or interaction between the moderator and the interviewees, and the “horizontal interaction” among the group participants which heightens the opportunity for participants to decide the direction and content of the discussion (p. 80). Patton (1990)
wryly suggested that concerns about reactivity might be related to a slight touch of self-importance on the part of the researcher! I believe that my approach as a learner in the interview situation, the acknowledgment of participants' knowledge and my positioning of them "as experts," and the rapport established were instrumental in minimizing my influence or reactivity in the interviews and were key to eliciting high quality data.

Data Collection

In this section I present an overview of the data gathering techniques. I begin with a description of the pilot test of a focus group interview and questions. Next I describe the structure, composition, scheduling, and other logistical issues related to the focus group interview. Then I discuss information pertaining to the conduct of the interviews and other researcher process details. Finally I describe the manner in which I gathered additional data in form of field notes during the course of the research.

Pilot Test

I developed my questions for the focus group interviews (Appendix D) using the Specific Research Questions listed in Chapter 1 as a guide. The interview questions became a translation of my research objectives into language that was direct, forthright, comfortable, and simple (Krueger, 1998) so that participants would be encouraged and motivated to share their experiences and perspectives. To ensure that I was constructing questions that would be clear and understandable to all participants (Patton, 1990) I conducted a pilot test of the questions using a resource group of several knowledgeable observers who were familiar to me and with the topic (Frey & Fontana, 1993; Krueger, 1998). The pilot test group consisted of several colleagues, acquaintances, and family members who met with me, listened to the questions, gave their answers, and finally gave
me feedback on the questions. My pilot test then was conducted with people who met the specifications for being in the focus group (Krueger, 1998). It was the opportunity to simulate a focus group interview and to clarify the questions. The resource group was used to pretest questions from the interview guide for readability, comprehension, wording, and response variation (Frey & Fontana, 1993). Adjustments and comments made by individuals in the pilot test setting were helpful in assessing the efficacy of my questions. Members of my candidacy committee also offered helpful suggestions regarding questions to ask as well as the phrasing of questions. The use of an interview guide and the opportunity to pretest questions added to the flow of the focus group discussions and strengthened the framework of the research design.

Composition of Interview Groups

The 16 participants included four individuals in each role – teacher, parents, principals, and assistant principals. Unfortunately one assistant principal was unable to participate because of sudden illness on the day of the interview. However an additional parent expressed an interest in the study that raised the parent group number to five, and maintained the total participant sample at sixteen. Although I recruited participants based on the role that they had in their school several individuals occupied more than one role in their lives and therefore may have responded from a dual perspective in the study. For example several teachers and administrators were also parents. In fact a commonality of experience resulted in participants having both a sense of comfort and an increased level of understanding with each other.

All participants were involved in two focus group interviews resulting in a total of eight interviews for the study. The number of groups in the project is the primary
determinant of how much data the research produces. As a self-contained focus group study I conducted approximately 16 hours of taped interviews (each interview took about two hours) and generated approximately 500 pages of transcribed conversation. Morgan (1997) argued that an advantage of focus group interviews is their relative efficiency in comparison to individual interviews at least in terms of gathering equivalent amounts of data (p. 13). Similarly Patton described focus group methodology as a “highly efficient qualitative data collection technique” (p. 335). It should be noted however that although focus groups are an efficient method to gain a concentrated insight into participants’ thinking on a topic, the notion that they are a “quick and cheap” technique is a myth (Morgan & Krueger, 1993). As Morgan (1997) maintained, when pursued as a self-contained research technique, focus groups demand the same attention to detail as any other means of data collection.

I considered eight focus group interviews to be adequate for the study for three reasons. First, because I used a purposeful sampling technique in the study, I considered that my targeted number of groups would enable me to provide trustworthy answers to the research questions (Morgan, 1997). Second, I was interested in the perspectives of four stakeholder groups who met first in homogeneous groupings that segmented participants by role description. For their second interview the participants were regrouped into a cross-role or mixed representation with a parent, teacher, principal, and assistant principal in each of the four groups. I hoped that the progression from matched to mixed groups would uncover statements and perspectives that would enrich description of the topic (Morgan, 1997). Finally in terms of Marshall and Rossman’s (1994) caution regarding the “do-ability” (p. 6) of a study, an increase in the total number of focus group
interviews in this study would have raised concerns over not only additional efforts in recruitment and data collection but also management and analysis of the data.

As mentioned the first round of four focus group interviews involved stakeholders in homogeneous groupings that segmented participants by role description. Morgan defined segmentation as “the decision to control the group composition to match carefully chosen categories of participants” (p. 35). Morgan (1998) further explained that decisions reached based on segmentation ideally will match the decisions made with regard to homogeneity and compatibility. In sum the intent of segmenting participants by role for the first interview was to ensure that participants had something to say about the topic and that they felt comfortable saying it to each other. Therefore in the research design the separation of participants into segments was made with the key assumption that experiences related to one’s role would correspond to different perspectives on the topic. In the subsequent analysis of the data the use of a group-by-group question grid enabled me to make a systematic comparison of the groups across the multiple segments. Furthermore for participants who may have entered into the study with a certain uneasiness or trepidation I hoped that the first interview in the company of others who occupied the same role would provide them with a sense of comfort and trust in the process. Several factors also influenced the number of focus groups in the first set of interviews including the number of groups required to achieve saturation – the point at which additional data collection no longer generates new understanding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Morgan (1997) explained that projects generally consist of three to five groups because more groups seldom provide meaningful new insights.
Participants' second interview took place about one month later and was in a mixed grouping. Several factors influenced the composition of the mixed groups including gender, school setting and size, experience and tenure, key informant status based on the first interview, and availability. Two slight changes occurred in the composition of the mixed focus groups. In one group the interview took place with only three participants – principal, teacher, and parent. The assistant principal had who was scheduled to participate in the group had to attend to an emergency hospital situation with a staff member. After waiting approximately 20 minutes past the scheduled start of the interview I proceeded somewhat cautiously with the interview. My concern was that the loss of one group member would have a negative impact on the group dynamics. However, the interview proceeded well thanks to a group of three highly involved participants. The second slight difference in the representation of stakeholder roles in one interview was the inclusion of two parents in one of the mixed interview groups. However this group did have a full complement of all of the roles because the teacher in the group was also a vice principal.

Although as Morgan (1997) pointed out “it is possible to plan in advance changes in the research design such as a switch from an initial set of homogeneous groups to a subsequent set of mixed groups” (p. 68), the actual content and questions for the second set of interviews were contingent on what was learned through an ongoing encounter with the data. Such changes over time are inherent in any qualitative design that emphasizes emergence (Morgan, 1997). Furthermore, the rationale for moving from matched to mixed groupings was to gather further data that would enrich the topic. Specifically I wanted to understand how different perspectives operate in the same setting. To achieve
this goal my first step involved conducting separate focus group interviews within each of
the relevant categories. This data had the capacity to reveal understandings of the way
that participants from various categories or roles both overlap and diverge in their
experiences and perspectives on collaboration. However data from the first set of
interviews did not provide understanding about the dynamics of the interaction between
categories or roles. Tapping into the interaction between categories required a further set
of mixed groups. Morgan (1997) described the potential of the design of studies such as
this one to provide meaningful data. According to Morgan, a progression from matched
groups to mixed groups has the potential to uncover statements that participants might
make in homogeneous groups but not in mixed company. Alternatively, new statements
could appear in mixed discussion that would not come up among those who all share the
same perspective. In either situation, the resulting data could provide valuable
illumination of the topic. (p. 68)

Scheduling and other Logistics

Data collection took place over a period of four months from March 2000 to June
2000. This timeline was consistent with Morgan’s (1997) experience when he suggested
that depending on the number of the groups, the availability of the participants, and the
kind of analysis intended for the transcripts, one could count on a study taking between
three and six months.

To begin with recruitment of participants was quite time-consuming. There was a
necessary interval of time between initial contact with potential participants (either by
letter, telephone, or face-to-face) and follow-up contact regarding their interest and
possible participation. This gave participants an opportunity to think about the study,
digest the information, and consider whether they wanted to be involved. Generally my follow-up contact was made through a telephone call. It was often impossible to reach teachers and administrators who are difficult to contact by telephone during their working hours. Once I had an initial agreement to participate from individuals I sent a thank you letter (Appendix E) to them for being part of the study and also sent them the Consent for Participation in Research (Appendix F) forms to read and to sign. In the case of parents, I enclosed the Consent for Participation in Research forms with my introductory letter and several parents agreed to participate and returned the forms to me immediately. Other parents, as mentioned previously, decided to participate after speaking to me personally on the telephone about the study.

Another crucial planning issue was selecting a convenient time and scheduling the interviews. There was a time interval of one month between the first and second round of interviews that allowed for transcription, analysis of data, planning of content for the second interviews, as well as scheduling of the second set of interviews. As Morgan and Krueger (1993) cautioned, I now had participants who were quite willing to discuss the topic at hand but bringing the individuals together to do so posed many obstacles (p. 12). In contemplating what might conflict with the focus group the most obvious issues were work and family. Based upon feedback from participants I decided that late afternoon and early evening was the most suitable time for the interviews. I asked participants to commit to a 4:30-6:00 p.m. time slot although most interviews ran closer to two hours. The most expedient way to find appropriate dates that would suit the four people in each group was to try and coordinate individual schedules. Therefore I faxed a letter (Appendix H) to participants that included a calendar for the month of the interview and
asked them to mark the dates that they were not available. I then used this information to schedule the interviews and contacted participants to give them the date for their interview. My final contact with participants before the actual interview was a reminder call the day before their interview. All participants, given their busy lives, seemed to appreciate the reminder. My contact served to reinforce that their contribution was important and that an agreement to participate was a commitment on their part (Morgan, 1998). As well, my continuous contact with participants (both written and verbal) maintained the participants’ interest in the study, and also allowed us to continue to get to know each other and build a positive rapport. In the process of scheduling the interviews there were many obstacles along the way such as last minute changes, maintaining diversity in groups while considering availability, and frequent telephone calls. Fortunately in this study, none of these obstacles proved to be insurmountable.

The logistics of planning the interviews included selection of a site. As described earlier, the interviews took place in a “neutral” conference area that is part of the facility organization for the district. This involved booking rooms in the facility that would be comfortable for the participants and where it would be possible to record the session. The principle means of capturing observations in a focus group is through audio taping. Therefore ensuring the quality of the recorded data is crucial. I loaned my equipment which included a high quality tape recorder and a pressure zone microphone (PZM) from the communications media at the University of Calgary. In working through the university I also was able to obtain expert advice from individuals with technical experience who went over the recording setup with me. The PZM microphone was particularly useful in the study because it is omni directional and highly sensitive. As a
result the tapes provided a crisp sound quality, an important factor in capturing all of the data.

**Interviews**

Experience gained during the pilot test, personal experience, and theoretical background in communication theory along with consultation of several tests that examine the use of interviews in qualitative research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Krueger, 1998; Merriam, 1988; Morgan, 1997, 1998; Patton, 1990; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) informed the content and conduct of the focus group interviews. The interviews followed a semi-structured format using an interview guide that focused on specific themes and included suggested questions with pre-planned probes under each major issue (Appendix G). In interview guides, a series of probes are often connected to a specific question in order to remind the interviewer to probe for items that might not be mentioned spontaneously (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). However not every question had a pre-determined probe allowing for many on-the-spot probes used spontaneously in order to amplify or clarify an account.

**Interview Guide**

The interview guide is especially useful in conducting group interviews because it keeps the interactions focused while allowing individual perspectives to emerge (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998; Morgan, 1997). In this study the guide helped in focusing the group on the research questions as well as in making comparisons across groups in the analysis phase of the research. The concept of guide emphasizes that the researcher’s questions should help channel the discussion without the moderator controlling, dominating, or forcing the group into a predetermined mold. “An effective guide can produce a discussion that manages itself, whereas an ineffective guide can
produce problems that no amount of moderating can fix” (Morgan, 1997, p. 48).

Moreover, although the interview questions were prepared in advance and somewhat structured so that comparable data could be collected from each group, in keeping with the tenets of qualitative research they also were designed to be open-ended and flexible to allow the kind of discussion that would produce rich and relevant data (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The effectiveness of the questions was monitored through my field observations, participant feedback after the interviews, and my initial analysis of the data after each interview. The necessity to be clear and precise in phrasing questions was evident when I read the transcriptions of the first set of interviews. Consequently I made adjustments in the wording of several questions and continued to focus on clarity in my questioning.

**Interview Phases** Following the same procedures in the conduct of each focus group interview was an important consideration in ensuring that there was consistency in data collection. Greenbaum’s (1988) division of the focus group session into phases provided me with a useful framework to follow, but also allowed me to remain flexible to respond to the individual dynamics of each group.

Presession arrangements involved making sure the facility was ready by arranging the room, assembling and testing the equipment, and organizing the refreshments. I usually arrived 60 minutes before the start of the session to allow sufficient time to accomplish the tasks as well as to prepare myself mentally for the hard work and challenge of moderating the focus group interview. Krueger (1998) described the mental and emotional discipline required of the moderator not only in guiding a discussion but at the same time being involved in the complex process of generating and analyzing data.
The introductory phase of the focus group process begins when the participants walk into the room and continues into the first few minutes of the focus group interview (Greenbaum, 1988). Because participants arrived at different times, purposeful small talk maintained the warm and friendly environment until the interview could begin. The casual, relaxed, and informal talk helped to put participants at ease (Krueger, 1998) and established rapport amongst group members and with the researcher. As well when participants arrived, I made them name tags using their middle names as an alias. Participants understood through their informed consent for participation in the research that confidentiality would be honored through the use of an alias in the interview. I purposely did not introduce people using their real names because I wanted participants to know and be comfortable with each other using their alias. I realized how effective this procedure was in maintaining confidentiality when, at the time of the second interview, one of the participants told the story of meeting another participant at the grocery store, remembering her only by her alias! Krueger (1998) maintained that the first few moments in a focus group discussion are critical and that much of the success of the group interview is related to what happens in the two to four minute introduction. According to Krueger (1995) although differences between groups should be expected, “the moderator should introduce the group discussion in a consistent manner” (p. 21). Therefore, I prepared a brief introduction (Appendix C) that included welcome and purpose, topic, procedures, and moderator’s role, and read it in the first few minutes of each of the interviews in the first round. The next step in the introductory phase described by Greenbaum (1998) as the “warm-up” and by Krueger (1998) as the “ice breaker allowed the participants to talk and tell something about themselves such as their role, information
about their school, what they do, etc.” According to Krueger (1998) after the participant has once said something, it becomes easier to speak again. Also, the warm-up question underscores the common characteristics of the participant, and demonstrates that they all have a basis for sharing information on the topic.

The next phase of the focus group is the specific topic discussion. I approached this stage of the interview with the assumption that in qualitative interviewing “the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (Patton, 1990, p. 278) and with the understanding that the quality of the information or data obtained was largely dependant on me as the moderator (Patton, 1990). Issues such as interview strategies and skills, context, wording and sequencing of questions, relationship, trust and rapport between researcher and participants, and the tone and flow of the interview were all critical factors in the interview process. Because the communication process in group settings may be subject to problems that pose threats to the validity of the data, (Albrecht, Johnson & Walther, 1993) it was important to be aware of and use appropriate strategies to deal with participant behaviours such as compliance, identification, group think, and internalization (Albrecht et al., 1993; Frey & Fontana, 1994).

Compliance and Identification Compliance and identification are both behaviours in which an individual’s response is influenced by what he or she thinks another person wants to hear. Specifically compliance is the act of responding in ways one believes is expected by the questioner (Albrecht et al., 1993). Similarly in identification a participant might assume the position held by another individual — often someone that is admired. The other person could be another individual in the group (a situation that
results from interpersonal attraction between group members) or it could signal the desire to affiliate with the moderator. As mentioned earlier I adopted the role of interested learner in the study. Because I did not present as an expert or share my feelings or opinions in the interview, I attempted to give participants the message that there was no wrong or right answer. Because one of the dangers of the group discussion is that people may feel pressured to agree with others I emphasized in my introduction (cover story) as well as through my behavior during the interview that it was acceptable and in fact desirable for them to disagree on issues (Madriz, 2000). In adopting a stance of neutrality (Albrecht et al., 1993; Patton, 1990) with regard to the phenomenon I was accepting and nonjudgmental of the responses from participants—both verbally and nonverbally making sure that a head nod or a comment did not imply judgments about the quality of the comment. As well, to avoid influencing participants in their comments I understood that it was critical to use open-ended questions that avoided leading the response in any direction. Leading questions are the opposite of neutral questions in that they give the participants “hints” about what might be a desirable or appropriate kind of answer.

**Group Think** Various researchers (Frey & Fontana, 1994; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) have cautioned about the “group think” (Janis, 1972) condition that may arise in focus groups in which participants’ desire for cohesion takes away from individual, critical discussion and examination of the topic. Albrecht et al. (1993) however suggested that the group think process is probably less frequent in ad hoc focus groups than in ongoing problem-solving groups in which group solidarity forces have had time to congeal (p. 56). Conformity was not an issue in the study for several reasons. First, in explaining the purpose of the research to participants both at the recruitment stage and in the formal
introduction to the first interview, I was clear that the goal of the study was to find out as much as possible about participants' experiences and feelings on collaboration. The study did not involve such conformity-producing goals as making decisions or reaching consensus (Morgan & Krueger, 1993). Rather the objective was to gather high-quality data in a social context where people could consider their own views in the context of the views of others (Patton, 1990). Furthermore I reinforced the goals of the study by continually asking participants to describe personal experiences. Once a participant had described an experience or activity, I probed further for interpretations, opinions, and feelings based on that experience. Therefore participant feelings and opinions were grounded in relation to their own experience (Patton, 1990). With this approach there was no pressure toward conformity that might have limited discussion. As well, the time, effort, and attention given to building rapport with participants throughout the entire research process helped to create an open and permissive atmosphere in which each person felt free to share his or her point of view. My experience was consistent with that of Morgan and Krueger (1993) who stated: "When participants see that the researchers are genuinely interested in learning as much as possible about their experiences and feelings, then conformity is seldom a problem" (p. 8). In fact participants described their sense of comfort after the interview, and their comments concerning how quickly time passed confirm their engagement in the process. Another interesting phenomenon that occurred at the end of several interviews was that participants did not leave immediately. Krueger (1995) recognized and referred to the phenomenon as a "nice problem" (p. 32) that indicates that participants have perhaps bonded with others, learned from others, and may want to discuss the topic or some other area of concern in greater detail.
Disclosure  A key issue in the dynamics of focus group methodology is how to facilitate the disclosure of internalized opinions. Internalization is related to the report of opinions that are deeply engrained and personal (Albrecht et al., 1993). The disclosure of intense personal experiences and the resultant feelings and attitudes are more difficult to realize in a group situation. The extent to which participants feel comfortable talking about such issues depends on the level of trust and rapport in the group. Commenting on how and when participants might divulge deeply held personal experiences in focus groups, Marshall and Rossman (1995) advised that "the trick is to promote the participant disclosure through the creation of a permissive environment" (p. 84). While I have described the behaviours that were instrumental in maintaining a neutral stance to the content of what was said in the group, I also needed to demonstrate empathy or understanding of the "stance, position, feelings, experiences, and worldview of others" (Patton, 1990, p. 56). Empathy, then, communicates interest in and caring about people and rapport is built on the ability to convey empathy (Patton, 1990). Throughout the course of the interviews I used the technique of active listening to demonstrate my interest in what participants had to say. Goleman (1998) claimed that "a finely tuned ear is at the heart of empathy" (p. 140). To show participants that I was listening well I asked clarifying questions, probed their responses, restated in my own words what I had heard to ensure understanding, and made connections between comments made by a participant at various points in the interview. A questioning technique described by Patton (1990) proved useful in encouraging participants to share deeply held experiences by providing a context for their response through a role-play. The context provided cues about the level at which a response was expected. For example, in a question posed to
Mary, a principal, I described a situation and then asked her how she would respond.

Moderator:

Let me give you a situation, Mary. Let's say there was a decision that was made collaboratively in the school, for example, we cancelled an event that has always taken place in the school. So you have a couple of parents who come up to you and say “Why was this decision approved?” You indicate that it was a collaborative decision, but the parent says to you: “But, you’re the principal, you have the decision making power in the school.” How would you respond to that?

The role playing question in this format put Mary in the role of expert and the moderator in the position of novice. Casting myself as a learner correspondingly cast the respondent as a teacher. According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992) being put in the role of expert enhances the participant’s satisfaction resulting in greater rapport and openness to sharing personal experiences. As a result, Mary was most anxious to share expertise and experience with the novice. In this study, participants did share emotional and difficult personal stories with the group. Their willingness to be open despite the intensity of some of the personal experiences is captured in a comment made by Jean as she was telling her story: “This is really personal because you probably know who I am talking about so this is hard for me to do this but I’ll do it.” As Krueger (1988) advised, to illuminate the topic “the moderator establishes a climate for communication, and participants develop a rapport based on trust and confidence (p. 6). Without this trust, the questions just aren’t as effective.

The final stage or section of the focus group is the close, which is intended to send people away with a positive feeling about the focus group process in which they participated. The close took only a few minutes but is an important part of the group
session because it affords the opportunity to thank participants, indicate how much their participation is valued, and set the tone for the next interview. The postgroup reflection was a time for me to record observations about the interview in my field book and listen to the tape of the interview. This period of time after each interview was a critical time of reflection and elaboration. As Patton (1990) expressed, it is a time for guaranteeing the quality of the data.

Transcription

Transcription of the audio tapes of the interviews was carried out by a typist, formerly employed by the university, with considerable experience in transcription. Because the raw data of the interviews are quotations, I decided the most desirable data to obtain would be a verbatim transcription of the interviews. My interviewing technique that combined a conversational approach within the open-ended questions of an interview guide, along with the sharing and comparing of ideas and experiences among participants, added to the complexity of the transcription process. As is typical of natural conversation among people, sentences began and then were interrupted by new sentences, structure was imperfect, and grammar was sometimes non-existent. Therefore, full transcription was time-consuming (each tape took the transcriber approximately 8 1/2 hours) and costly but well worth the effort since full transcription was extremely useful in data analysis. Furthermore, when I received the transcripts back, I went over all of them once again with the tapes, filling in the name of the person speaking when it was missing, and also attempting to capture words or phrases that the transcriber had missed. Although participants were urged to speak clearly and not too quickly and equipment was top-notch, individual patterns of speaking, accents, etc., sometimes made it difficult to
understand individual words or phrases. Participant checking of the transcripts also clarified several unintelligible or wrongly transcribed phrases.

**Field Notes**

Because my research was a self-contained focus group study, my field notes became an important supplementary data source to the transcriptions of the interviews. The field notes I took after each interview were observations about the interview itself including what and how things were said, how participants reacted to the interview, observations about my role, and any additional information that would help to establish a context for interpreting and making sense out of the interview. In the course of gathering data, ideas about possible analysis also occurred. I recorded my thoughts, feelings, impressions, speculations, reactions, biases, and strategies for continuing the research in my field notes. These ideas constituted the beginning of analysis. I tried to capture and keep track of analytical insights in my field notes but also was careful not to allow initial interpretations to distort additional data collection (Patton, 1990). The field notes proved useful as they allowed me to follow the development and refinement of themes throughout the research.

**The Quality of the Inquiry**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), ensuring the trustworthiness of research needs to be of prime concern to researchers. In qualitative studies, the criteria of credibility (internal validity), generalizability (external validity), dependability, and confirmability have been used to evaluate the trustworthiness or quality of the project (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall and Rossman, 1995). Because understanding is the primary rationale for investigation in qualitative research, the guidelines for determining
the trustworthiness of a study are different than those used in quantitative, positivist research in which the goal is to discover a law or test a hypothesis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). Qualitative researchers emphasize the meaningfulness or validity of their studies while quantitative researchers emphasize reliability and replicability in research (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

Credibility

Patton (1990) stated that the credibility of an inquiry depends on rigorous techniques and methods for gathering high-quality data that are carefully analyzed; the credibility of the researcher based on education, training, experience, status, and presentation of self; and a philosophical belief on the part of the researcher in qualitative methodology that grounds the study. I employed a variety of strategies to ensure credibility and lend internal validity to the study. I kept accurate and detailed records. Patton (1990) argued that qualitative researchers have an obligation to describe their analytical procedures and that these processes must be documented as fully and truthfully as possible (p.372). In this regard I was intentionally conscious throughout my study of the need to collect my data and follow through with my analysis in a careful and systematic manner. The rich description of my research process as presented in this chapter hopefully follows Miles and Huberman's (1985) recommendation that a "transparency" of method is the best way for qualitative researchers to address issues of reliability and validity. I secured informed consent by having participants sign the appropriate forms (Appendix A). As well, the choice of participants was very significant for the content of the study. The use of well-informed subjects added to the credibility of my research. In addition I returned interview transcripts and analyses to participants to
check for accuracy as well as giving participants the authority to veto any data that they felt might cause them harm or misrepresent their understandings. The letter to the participants following the second interview (Appendix I) shows how the member checking process was presented to participants. Several corrections were made to the transcripts on the basis of the feedback received from the participants. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) suggested that “it strengthens the researcher’s relationships with informants and the quality of the study to have informants review draft manuscripts” (p. 97). As described under the data collection section, I was aware of and used appropriate strategies to deal with participant behaviours in the focus group interviews (compliance, identification, group think, and internalization) that could have threatened the validity of the study. Finally I kept field notes in the form of a research journal that described the details of my study and included my personal responses to the research process.

Merriam (1998) also suggested that internal validity or the accuracy of the information and whether it matches reality is dependent on the ability and the accuracy with which the researcher represents participant perspectives of the phenomenon. As previously mentioned Patton (1990) agreed that validity or credibility “hinges to a great extent on the skill, competence, and rigor of the person doing field work” (p. 14). To this end then it is important that the researcher know his or her own educational development which is evidenced by the way the inquiry is conducted. I feel that the format of my research study reflects my understanding of human interaction and communication, adult learning, school development, and leadership based upon my extensive experience as a teacher and administrator in schools, university instructor, and professional development planner and facilitator. However at this point it is important to
repeat that my role as a learner remained constant throughout the research process. Therefore, although my own knowledge and experiences allowed me to make sense of what I was hearing from participants, I also made every effort not to filter participant responses through my own lens of what I thought or wanted to hear.

**Generalizability**

External validity assesses the degree to which the research findings are generalizable to other situations. There is agreement among researchers (Krueger, 1998; Patton, 1990; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) that qualitative methods are best suited to developing understandings that apply to a specified group of people at a particular time and are not well-suited to reaching generalizations about the larger population. However this does not mean that findings of the particular cannot be generalized. The primary strategy used in this project to ensure external validity is the provision of rich, detailed description (Cresswell & Miller, 2000). Based on the description and contextual information provided in my study, it is the reader of the study who will make decisions about the applicability of the findings to other settings or similar contexts. Anyone interested in transferability will have a solid framework for comparison (Meniam, 1988). Furthermore, because the focus group approach inherently involves conducting a number of interviews, it is possible to assess the validity of the data by comparing statements within and, more importantly, across interviews. Morgan (1999) used the term “group-to-group validation” (p. 63) to refer to similarities in responses to the topic across groups. Knodel (1993) recognized that this advantage in assessing reliability is an important difference between the focus group approach and other qualitative research strategies (p.
This advantage allowed me to generalize in my findings and may allow others to generalize beyond my study.

**Dependability**

Like the issue of generalizability the uniqueness of the study within a specific context mitigates against replicating it exactly in another situation. However as Cresswell (1994) indicated statements about the researcher's position, assumptions, selection of informants, biases, and values enhance the chances that the study might be replicated in another setting. By providing such detailed information with respect to methodology and analysis protocols I hope that as Merriam (1998) stated: "rather than demanding that outsiders get the same results, one wishes outsiders to concur that, given the data collected, the results make sense – they are consistent and dependable" (p. 172).

**Confirmability**

Confirmability describes the extent to which others who review the research results can confirm the characteristics of the data. An audit trail of records greatly establishes the likelihood of such confirmability by allowing others to inspect the researcher's procedures. As well as keeping an audit trail, I have maintained thorough field notes that record each design decision and the rationale behind it. All collected data are being kept in a well-organized, retrievable form in a locked place in my filing cabinet and in appropriate secure files on my computer. This thesis will serve as the final synthesis of the process, product, and protocol of the study.

**Ethical Considerations**

It is important to note that ethics approval was requested and received from the university and the employing school jurisdiction. The approval was sought using the
official methods agreed upon between this university and the school district involved. The participants were all volunteers who were recruited because of their experiences with and involvement in the topic of collaboration.

In this study all participants were fully informed of the expectations for their involvement – the number of interviews and the approximate time each would take, their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and their right to veto any data that they had supplied. This information along with a description of the study and of how their anonymity would be honored was provided in the form of a Letter of Consent (Appendix A). All participants signed and returned the letter. No one withdrew from the study and all were extremely cooperative. A copy of the letter was given to them for their own records.

The ethics approval process and Letter of Consent provided a framework within which participants could respond comfortably, accurately, and honestly to my questions. It was important for me to demonstrate explicitly that my goal as researcher was neither moral judgment nor immediate reform but understanding (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). I did this by describing my role and what my actions would be as moderator in the introduction to the first interview (Appendix C). Therefore although I was empathetic in my stance toward participants, I remained neutral or nonjudgmental about what participants said during the interview (Patton, 1990). As a result participants appeared to share openly and willingly their personal experiences and deeply held opinions and beliefs.

I am confident that developing a positive relationship, along with ethical considerations and guarantees of anonymity allowed me greater access to personally held
critical stories and information rich data. One unique ethical issue in focus groups is the fact that what participants tell the researcher is inherently shared with other group members as well. This raises serious invasion of privacy concerns and limits the kinds of topics that can be pursued in focus groups. It is important to note that the topic of this study did not require participants to share private and intimate details about their lives and therefore was an appropriate choice for focus group methodology.

Because participants included educators, the code of ethics for the academic professional association also guided the discussion. I continually reinforced that discussion should include the removal of “identifiers” or any other potential threats to confidentiality. Adherence to the ethical code did not present barriers to objective and critical discussion of the topic – in fact it helped both myself and participants to focus on the generalizable patterns and commonalities emerging in the discussion and to avoid being deflected into telling or hearing “juicy” human interest stories (Lofland & Lofland, 1995).

Finally I was conscious of the importance of basic courtesies in dealing with the participants. I frequently acknowledged their generosity in sharing their time and understandings during the study as well as formally at the end of the study when thank you cards were sent to each participant. I was pleasantly surprised to receive several thank you cards from participants who appreciated, enjoyed, and learned from their involvement in the research. In terms of reciprocity I received the words of gratitude from respondents as an indication that they were pleased with the opportunity for personal expression and reflection that the research interviews afforded (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).
Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Although I consulted and proceeded with the task of data analysis based on the recommendations of Bogdan and Biklen (1998), Glesne and Peshkin (1992), Marshall and Rossman (1995), Merriam (1988), Morgan (1997), and Patton (1990) I understood that there is no single way to achieve the analysis of qualitative data (Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Patton, 1990). However, although I needed to find my own process, I also realized that as a qualitative researcher I had the obligation to describe the analytical process that I employed and to record my procedures in a complete manner (Patton, 1990). Presented below is a description of the steps that I took to make sense of the data and to present the findings in a way that reveals their significance and importance.

Stages of Analysis

The initial stage of my analysis of the participants’ understanding of their collaborative experiences began while data were being collected. The completion of each interview provided me with the opportunity to organize, reflect, speculate, and try to discover what the data had to tell me. At this stage, I wrote memos to myself, developed analytic files, and applied rudimentary coding schemes in order to learn from and manage the information I was collecting. Furthermore the results of this early data analysis became important in the planning of subsequent data collection as I shaped and focused the interview questions and content. In addition the initial review of focus group discussion and my field notes directed me in my continuing exploration of literature.
relevant to my study. In an ongoing way my reading supported both the emergent nature of the study and my interpretation and analysis of the data.

The next stage of my inquiry involved "working at" analysis (Lofland & Lofland, 1995) in an attempt to organize and process the data. After the final interviews were transcribed and participants had validated the transcripts I followed the advice of several authors (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1988) and read through all the data three times in order to become familiar with the data "in intimate ways" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). During the reading process I concentrated on noting patterns, regularities, and topics that became the beginnings of possible coding categories. As well, as a part of data organization, I performed minor editing and cleanup of field notes to make them manageable and retrievable.

Categorization and Coding of the Data

I began the categorization phase of data analysis by placing each of the interview questions under one of the primary research questions posed at the outset of the study (Appendix B). Using the strategy of cross-case analysis and the technique of "cutting and pasting" (Patton, 1990) I categorized responses from individuals and different stakeholder groups under each of the interview questions. In this study the use of an interview guide ensured that each group discussion covered more or less the same topics although the relevant data was not found in the same place in each interview. The interview guide served as a descriptive analytical framework for analysis (Patton, 1990, p. 336). Therefore, the research design of this study that included the interview guide and segmentation of groups by role had an influence on my subsequent analysis of the data in that it provided me with the basic structure for my coding scheme. Furthermore because
a central tenet of focus group methodology is to present “a polyphonic account of findings” (Frey & Fontana, 1993, p. 26) rather than an in-depth description of any given participant, I was interested in discovering the larger issues and themes that represented a broad spectrum of respondents’ perspectives that emerged from across all of the focus group interviews.

From the initial categories of response I then developed codes for what I perceived to be “chunks” of the data. These chunks or “units” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) of my data consisted of participants’ comments and included a phrase, several sentences, a short paragraph, and indirect observations. As I continued to work with the data, my initial or rudimentary coding scheme became more specific and focused as I coded the contents of each major code unit, thereby breaking down the major code into numerous subcodes. Eventually I was able to place similar pieces together into data units that formed a meaningful sequence that contributed to the findings chapters of this dissertation.

Throughout this stage of analysis, I attempted to gain a deeper understanding of participants’ collaborative experiences and to refine my interpretations continually as my coding process evolved. In so doing the process of data analysis was a partly mechanical, but mostly interpretive undertaking (Glesne & Peshkin, 1995; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

Data Display As mentioned previously I used the hands-on technique of cutting and pasting to sort and classify my data under appropriate interview questions. In my initial coding, I used each interview question (which also fit under one of the specific research questions posed in the study) as a heading and posted it at the top of a sheet of 18” by 14” paper. Using 26 separate sheets of paper, I sorted all of the data into appropriate categories based on the interview questions. For each data set decisions were made
concerning the content of the data and category or question to which it applied. I attached each data category to the paper with two-sided tape which enabled me to arrange and re-arrange, label, and re-label data as I progressed in my analysis. As a result of this procedure, I developed a series of complete documents, each particular to a question or topic. In a fully visual way I could examine together all units of data particular to a theme. As well I was able to place related questions beside each other to look for overlap and recurrence in responses and to check the extent to which the data and findings were consistent. In sorting, displaying, and analyzing my data in this manner I not only was able to gain immediate visual access to all the data in a comparative way but also I gained a clear understanding of how participants as an entire group felt about a particular topic. That is not to say that the individual perspective of each participant was not important in this study. Rather the question that I asked myself as I worked with the data was: “What is the fit between different perspectives held by different people?” In looking for the fit my process of inductive analysis involved searching for patterns, themes, and categories that emerged from the data that would enable me to construct and communicate the essence of what the data revealed. In addition, to gain further focus and specificity in my analysis, I used colour coding to indicate the speaker’s role (parent, principal, teacher, or assistant principal). In so doing I was able to analyze individual and group responses to each question. In reporting the findings I felt that in some cases it might be helpful to the reader to know whether the individuals in a particular role held a view that was consistent with or different from other participants in the study. Despite the potential of the computer to assist in coding and filing, I, like many fieldworkers, found that laying out my detailed codings on a large surface made it easier for me to pore over the coded data
(Bogdan & Taylor, 1998). Therefore although I used my computer to store data, I discovered, as Lofland and Lofland (1995) cautioned, that analysis inside a computer was too confining for me. Furthermore, by displaying my data in this holistic manner, connections and disjunctions became clear and I was able to focus on identifying issues and themes at a higher level of generality. In particular the issues discussed in Chapter 8 are the outcomes of this final stage of thematic analysis.

For many authors the process of data analysis is an interpretive undertaking (Glesne & Peshkin, 1998). According to Patton (1990), interpretation means going beyond the descriptive data and attaching significance to what was found, drawing conclusions, building linkages, attaching meaning, and imposing order. Furthermore Patton argued that the researcher who has lived with the data is the most suitable person to speculate about meaning and make conjectures about significance. Because my goal was to present the findings in a manner that clearly represents their significance I was aware that "endless description becomes its own muddle" (Patton, 1990, p. 430). Therefore I was careful about choices that I made to illustrate or develop a particular theme or concept. As a consequence, because I did not convey the entire stories told by participants, I perhaps have missed key points that might have added richness and depth to the text. However, the selection of data that identified and supported important patterns and trends has allowed a larger conceptual framework of collaboration to emerge (see Chapter 7). Finally, to help the reader, I followed Patton's (1990) advice and revisited the literature to help focus the study by including parenthetical remarks throughout the text about information that had been validated at the point at which the finding was presented.
Writing the Findings

The research questions posed at the beginning of this study became the topics explored in the interviews, served as a framework for coding and analysis, and provided a storyline for the writing of this dissertation. Because focus group methodology offers a way for researchers to listen to the plural voices of others, the presentation of findings in this dissertation also reflects the multivocal nature of the research. For example when I presented data related to a particular topic or theme, I tried to capture the spirit, energy, and dynamic that characterized participant discussion as they responded to each other: providing agreement and disagreement, asking questions and giving answers, and sharing and comparing their ideas and experiences. In scripting the conversation, I tried to intertwine quotations into the text of the findings seeking a balance between presentation of data and analytic discussion of it. I followed Patton’s (1990) recommendations that “an interesting and readable report provides sufficient description to allow the reader to understand the basis for an interpretation and sufficient interpretation to allow the reader to understand the description” (p. 430).

Finally I was alert to the danger of generalizing about a group of people on the basis of what one or a few of them say or do (Bogdan & Taylor, 1998). In this vein I was careful to inform readers as to who said and did what by using qualifiers such as several participants, most individuals, or some people. Also, when I thought it might be helpful to the reader, I included and named the participant’s role in relation to their comments.

Summary

In this chapter I first presented the design and methodology that shaped and guided this inquiry. Next I introduced the site selection and entry procedures as well the
sampling technique for participant selection and recruitment. Then I detailed the methods used for data collection and analysis and outlined the researcher’s role in the process. Finally, I presented the details of measures that I employed to improve the trustworthiness of the findings and to meet accepted ethical standards. In the next chapter I will present the findings of my inquiry into the nature of collaboration.
Chapter 4 - The Nature of Collaboration

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings related to Specific Research Question 1: "What is the nature of collaboration?" The question focused on participant perspectives on the content of collaboration. Three questions are subsumed under this Question: (a) "How has the collaborative relationship developed?" (b) "How do stakeholders collaborate?" and (c) "What is the content of collaboration?" In turn these three questions guided the formation of the questions for the interviews. The interview questions were phrased in a manner that was clear and comprehensible allowing participants to respond based on their own experiences. I understood that it was my responsibility to make it clear to participants what was being asked (Patton, 1990). For example, for sub-question (a) "How has the collaborative relationship developed?" I asked such questions as: (1) "What brought you together?" (2) "What is the driving force behind collaboration in schools?" and (3) "Describe a time that you felt uncomfortable in a collaborative situation" (Appendix B). When I formulated the interview questions, I was not completely cognizant of where each question fit into the grand scheme of things. However as I spent more time with the data it became clear to me that each question did indeed fit into one of the primary research questions posed at the onset of the project.

The findings are presented under each sub-question and are inclusive of all of the interview questions and responses that are consistent in content with the particular sub-question. The chapter begins with general information about each of the participants. The information presented here was gathered from the interview transcripts.
Description of Participants

The 16 participants in the study are all stakeholders (parents, principals, assistant principals, and teachers) from 14 elementary schools in a large public school system in western Canada. Specifically 14 participants (2 principals, 3 teachers, 4 assistant principals and 5 parents) were from 11 schools located in one decentralized area of the district, and 3 participants (2 principals and 1 teacher) were from 3 schools in different areas of the district. The study included 12 females and 4 males, with both genders represented in each of the roles. The gender balance in the study is consistent with the demographic representation in elementary schools.

Assistant Principals

Lynne

Lynne has been in her current work setting for one year. She was newly appointed to this French immersion school. The medium-sized school has a staff of approximately 20 teachers. Due to an emergency situation in her school on the day of the second interview Lynne was unable to participate in the mixed group interview.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth is assistant principal at a medium-sized school that has been designated “high needs” by the system. Along with administrative responsibilities Elizabeth has a teaching assignment. Although newly appointed to the school Elizabeth is an experienced administrator.
Lee

Lee is an assistant principal in a school located in a very upper middle class location. Although the school is large Lee has teaching responsibilities in addition to his administrative role. Parental input and involvement in Lee’s school is high.

Parents

Laura

Laura is a stay-at-home mother with three children in grades eight, five, and kindergarten. She is chair of her elementary school council. The school is small with a student population of between 170 and 190 children.

Margaret

Margaret has been a volunteer at her school for the past nine years. During that time she has served on the school council in various capacities including volunteer coordinator, vice chair, and chairperson. The school has a small population of approximately 155 students.

Dorothy

Dorothy has two children - a son in grade four and a daughter in junior high. She is very actively involved in both schools, serving as chair of the school council in the elementary school and vice chair at the junior high. Dorothy says that she does not currently work outside the home so she has the time to do that.

Kerry

Kerry is a stay-at-home father, the prime care giver for two young sons. His two children attend different elementary schools and he is the chair for the school council in one of the
schools. Kerry's oldest son completed his education in system schools some years ago.

Kerry's school has a population of approximately 250 students.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth has served in various roles on the school council as well as volunteering in the classroom. Elizabeth, like other parents in the group, is currently not working outside the home. However she does bring past experiences in the corporate world to her role as chair of the school council. Her children all attend this larger elementary school.

Principals

Marly

Marly is an experienced administrator who is currently principal of a small school. Marly's school has a diverse student population with students coming from all over the city and even outside the city. The school has a staff of about 12 with lots of support in the way of assistants.

Ken

Ken also is an experienced principal. His school is a smaller, older one. It is a bus receiver school for a nearby community as well as serving the students from the community in which the school is located. Both of the communities represented in the school are "very solid." The children are described as motivated and there to work.

Mary

Mary has been a principal for two years but has considerable experience in other administrative positions. She is currently in a small school with a fairly diverse community. Over half of the students come from outside the community so before and after schoolcare is very much a part of this community.
Ann

Ann has considerable experience as a principal in several different schools. She is presently principal of a mid-size school which offers several specialty programs. Ann balances the role of principal with a teaching assignment in the school.

Teachers

Adele

Adele is a full-time teacher in her school but she divides her time between the classroom and other responsibilities. She is part of a large staff and is very involved in decision making in the school. She has been at her school for several years.

William

William teaches in a large school with a staff of approximately 25. He teaches as part of a team which has changed in membership over the five years that he has been at school. William also has some administrative responsibilities at the school.

Jean

Jean teaches in a small school and has been part of team learning situations since she has been at the school. She has considerable experience and background in education including several different roles in her career,

Susan

Susan teaches in a large elementary school. Her classroom teaching includes administrative responsibilities. Most of the students in Susan’s school are bused from other areas.
Forming the Collaboration

This section presents findings and discussion in relation to Subsidiary Research Question 1 (a) "How has the collaborative relationship developed?" Participants talked about experiences at the individual, organizational, system, and global level. In their collective stories the themes of goal, need, choice, and relationships emerged as conditions that foster collaboration. Alternatively participants expressed frustration over situations in which the expectation to collaborate came from others. Next each of the themes that appears to be bound to the discussion and capacity to collaborate is examined from the multi-perspective viewpoint of participants in the study.

Choice

Participants identified many compelling factors for entering into collaborative relationships including being a team player, creating something together, involvement with and learning from others, commitment, philosophy and work ethic, and mutual respect. Although the personal reasons varied all participants agreed that it is crucial that individuals participate in collaboration on a free and voluntary basis – because it is their choice. Mary, a principal in the group talked about her first feeling of success at collaboration:

I'm thinking about a teaching experience where I worked in a true teaming situation. When I think back on that experience, it was a three teacher team and we were responsible for a large group of two classes, 50 children, with an integrated special ed group of children who were very much integrated. So we came together, having had one year at the school and then coming together as a choice, a request to work as a team. It wasn't something that we did because we had no other choice, it was truly a way to work together and build everyone's experiences.
Mary later referred to that time as her “golden years of teaching.” When asked if she thought that the particular collaborative experience was better for the children as well, she responded: “Yes, I will still run into parents of children from those times, the children are grown up now – I just think that some of the work we did, yes, I think we did really wonderful things with kids.”

Similarly, Jean described her experience of two separate team teaching situations in the same school. In the first, the teaching assignment was established by the administration and in the second Jean and her partner chose to work together:

I wasn’t in on the interview so I didn’t know who I was getting – it’s a chance situation. And it didn’t work as well and so I worked at it all year but I felt ripped off! The next year the structure of the school changed and I wasn’t technically team teaching at all – but this person in the classroom, we got along so well, that we found occasions to collaborate. So I think to me what made it work was that we wanted it to work and if you force it from somewhere else it’s not as effective.

As well, participants described shared decision making experiences at the school level that were mandated by administrators. Hargreaves (1994) noted that contrived collegiality may result when administration wish to control and regulate more than true collaboration might allow them to do. William spoke of administrators “deciding to play this collaborative game in which we spent all this time in these meetings, and found out that this person had an agenda.” When asked why he thought the administration would call it collaboration, William responded: “Because that was the buzzword. That was the model that was being put out at the time.” Adele’s experiences as part of the professional development group in her school were similar:

I was on the professional development committee and meeting with a group of people trying to plan for the year for P.D. days. It seemed like we came up with a lot of interesting ideas and the principal kept saying “well
but, maybe we should do this, and well but, no that’s not really what we should be doing” and pretty much the whole year was what she wanted us to do. She basically took charge of the whole group and then made all the decisions. We had to keep going back and forth to meetings to keep planning and this was quite difficult knowing that they weren’t really collaborative decisions. I felt like I was wasting my time. Totally, I feel don’t put us through all the stages of collaboration, you really have a hidden agenda.

As in the experiences of William and Adele, when working together is imposed on individuals, the result is a collaboration that is superficial in nature; compulsory, not voluntary; pre-determined and fixed in time and space; and predictable in its outcomes (Hargreaves, 1994). As explained by a parent, Elizabeth, "I don't think collaboration for collaboration’s sake really works.” When probed as to why anybody would want to be engaged in collaboration for collaboration’s sake, Elizabeth replied “because this guide or management tells them that they should collaborate.”

Although principals in the study admitted that in terms of school improvement they are the ones who often are asking somebody to collaborate, they also felt, as Ann expressed, “the frustration over expectations around collaboration that don’t fit with conditions that we sometimes find ourselves in.” The lack of control over involvement expressed by teachers at the school level then is repeated by principals at the system level. Principals Ken and Ann expressed a betrayal of the collaborative process in being asked to spend time discussing something and then suddenly having a decision made anyway. Ken stated:

I often see what I call “clobberation” coming out of the system because they speak of it and expect it from us and yet many things that happen at the next level up don’t appear to have been true to the word as I think they really expect us to be.
Participants experienced both types of situations – involvement in collaboration by choice, and participation that was prescribed by others. Successful collaboration (as measured by the outcomes discussed in Chapter 7) was usually the result of collaboration that was voluntary while collaborative activity that was imposed by others often resulted in participants expressing feelings of frustration, betrayal, uselessness, cynicism, disappointment, pain, and anger. However collaboration continues to happen, albeit unsuccessfully, because, as Susan mentioned, "it's professed we need to be a collaborative group" or as others have said "because it is expected of us, it's the model that is being put out, or the guide and management tells us to collaborate." Therefore the question of "the focus that is driving collaboration in schools" was raised by Mary in discussion and was later taken up in the second focus group interview. As an issue that appears to impact the essential voluntary nature of the process, it is relevant to examine participants' perspectives on "where this collaborative movement has come from" (Mary).

**Why collaborate?** The focus group interview question that asked participants to comment on the driving force behind collaboration provided them with a means to explore their views concerning the pervasive call for collaboration in schools and society. While several participants such as Laura and Ann called collaboration "a sign of the times," William expressed the general feeling of the group when he declared "it's everywhere. It’s not just one part of your life or one part of your work, it’s everywhere!" However although participants agreed that the "call to collaborate" is clear and strong, they felt that schools and society are at different stages of embracing and internalizing the concept. For example from the parents' point of view Elizabeth and Kerry expressed the
opinion that in their experience schools have a collaborative environment. Alternatively Susan, a teacher, said that “I’m not sure that all schools buy into the collaborative model. I’m not sure that that necessarily happens – it does in some schools, but in others they haven’t bought in.” The notion that we are in the midst of change, in transition, playing catch up to newer systems, and that society is not there yet was reinforced by parents, teachers, and administrators.

A substantial amount of discussion concerning collaboration at the school level focused on collaboration as an extension of a larger understanding and appreciation of democracy or the democratic process. Phrases such as “fairness, equal voice, better society, involvement for everyone, democratic leadership, freedom to be part of the group, and the common good” rang through strongly in the voices of all of the stakeholders as they talked about “the collaborative movement.” As one parent, Laura, explained:

In my mind, when we talk about collaboration from the parent’s point of view and all the volunteers who work in the school, that work on the school council, basically to me it’s a chance for everyone to have a voice in whatever is happening. So, to me, it’s equating it to fairness.

Also speaking from the parent’s perspective, Kerry explained his appreciation that his voice had a forum in decision making in the school: “The ability to be able to have some input and know that there’s somebody there listening and not just, you know, a perfunctory function, but that your input is valued and is used in making the decision is the most important part.” As a teacher participating in the school improvement planning process in her school, Jean offered the following: “I like the way the planning now is done through the school improvement plan and I think it really is a very democratic
process. People’s views are requested, required, and listened to, and so it feels authentic.”

Laura argued that the more people involved in the decision, the more likely it will be successful. “If we’ve all had a say in it, then I think it works well, you get support behind the decision. I think the outcome is better and compliance is higher.” Finally from the principals’ perspective Mary summarized that “if you have input into a decision and you’ve worked through the decision making process, the decisions are made in a more democratic way.”

Although participants understood that a focus on democratic process is pushing collaboration to the forefront of organizational behaviour, they also agreed that changes in structure in both society and organizations are calling for working and being together in new ways. Lee explained that “what we’ve lived with is a patriarchal system and so we’re unlearning some of the things that we thought were the right way to go about it.”

The authors of the book *After Patriarchy* use the word patriarchy to refer to the social organization of a culture into systems that are hierarchical and male dominated in terms of values and power (Cooey, Eakin, & McDaniel, 1992). Participants understood the meaning of the term as demonstrated by their further use of the words “autocratic, pyramidical, hierarchical, traditional, and the old boy’s club” to describe structures in which top down management and decision making is the norm. As Jean expressed

If you’re used to the top down situation where you speak when you’re spoken to and you know the solutions are going to come from above, and the ideas and everything, to then suddenly be given the freedom to be a part of the group where your voice counts – that’s a very hard thing to learn and I’m not sure that everybody has learned it to the same extent.
Jean's reference to decision making that comes from the top down is substantiated in the literature on the principalship which is grounded in the traditional view of the leader and is premised on the positional power of the principal in a hierarchical organization (Prestine, 1994). As a result of this positional authority and without involvement of other school members as multi-faceted contributors, the principal becomes the sole decision maker in school change efforts. Therefore participants in this study relate the same frustrations with "top-down" reform initiatives that have been reported by other educators (Darling-Hammond, 1993; Fullan, 1993). Ken, speaking from his experience as a principal used different language to describe the structural changes that compel us to collaborate:

The pyramidical structures as opposed to the flat structure. It's one thing to be somebody in that pyramid who does what you're told, and probably does a very good job of it, it's another thing to work along side somebody and know your ideas may be the ones that go forward, may be the other person's ideas, but you all had input. So it depends on the organizational structure and is the organization really designed for collaboration.

Charles Handy's (1990, 1996) writing offers considerable insight on how dramatic changes are transforming business, education, and the nature of work. In particular Handy's theory of twin hierarchies, namely status hierarchy and task hierarchy, demonstrates the principle of interdependence in the work group. The concept is helpful in understanding how the flatter organizational structure described by Ken might function. Clearly in every organizational structure there exists a status hierarchy in which some people are justifiably senior to others because of their knowledge, experience and proven abilities. Traditionally the most senior person in the hierarchy - or the person of highest status - leads the group on any task or decision. However according to Handy
and participants in this study top-down decisions make no sense when the task requires a
diversity of skills and talents to reach the best possible solution. Task groups or
hierarchies then, are temporary alliances of expertise that need to make the best use of
one another to get the job done – interdependence in practice (Handy, p. 54). Mary,
reflecting on her role as a principal recognized that:

> We need all people to work together because sometimes I don’t have all the
answers. Maybe we’re getting away from that one best answer to more of
an open way of addressing concerns and really having faith that you’re
going to be able, with other people, to come to a creative solution.

“Having faith” as Mary commented requires considerable self-confidence from
those at the highest level in the status hierarchy if they are, on occasion, to work under the
direction of “juniors” (Handy, p. 54). Similarly, other principals in the study confirmed
the importance of “putting the trust back into the staff” and as Ann expressed, “being
willing to go with some decisions that you are basing on the faith of your staff even
though it may not be the decision that you would make yourself.”

According to Handy distinguishing between status and task hierarchies allows
organizations to become flatter while acknowledging that status will always exist within
an organization. Again participants in the study conceptually understood Handy’s
principle of twin hierarchies in their collaborative work. Kerry’s parental viewpoint
reflects his understanding:

> Part of the collaborative process is influencing other people with your
ideas or your experience – whether you’re the principal, or the chair, or
parents of a grade 1 person.

Several participants felt that the push towards collaborative activities in schools is
reflective of what is happening at a larger level in society. As Mary pondered, “Did more
of this collaborative movement come from teachers isolated in one classroom or did it just come from the reality of what our life is outside of school, the real world." In fact, Lee saw collaboration as a way of working together in order to cope with "the pace of life, amount of information, changes in the home in which the father is no longer the head making all decisions, and the very busyness of our lives." Lee’s understanding of the reality of life in the 21st century is descriptive of the complexity inherent in today’s world and is the nature of the postmodern condition. The shift from modern to postmodern education reflects change in the family as well as in the guiding beliefs of the larger society. Building on Lee’s description Elkind (1997) also talked about "the metamorphosis of the modern nuclear family into the postmodern permeable family that includes "a variety of kinship patterns, including nuclear, two working parents, single parent, adoptive, and remarried families" (p. 36). Speaking from the dual perspective of parent and administrator Lee argued that "if you don’t build in time in the family that you’re going to sit down and talk, then you’re not going to make collaborative decisions. You’re each going to be going your own ways.” Dorothy offered that as a parent “you want input from everyone involved as to where we’re going to go, what we’re going to do, and how we’re going to do it.” Collaboration then according to these participants is a way to deal with our complex and disjointed world because as Lee explained “there’s just too much for one person to handle.” His view is in accordance with Fullan (1993) who suggested that “the ability to collaborate on both a small and large scale is becoming one of the core requisites of postmodern society” (p. 24). Within this macro- view of the where and the why of collaboration Laura’s comment has particular significance:
I think life is collaboration. When we talk about it as something we do in school, basically we have been doing it ever since we were in kindergarten. I mean seriously, life is, that’s how we get things done.

Adding yet another perspective to “the why of collaboration,” participants discussed changes in education as “having a big impact on why we’re doing collaboration” (Lee). Again although participants strongly voiced the importance of relevant and meaningful learning and teaching, they also acknowledged that the mandate to work in new ways may come from administration. In this case when participation has not been voluntary, change in practice is often not sustained and individuals may revert back to old ways of doing things (Rosenholtz, 1989). As a result the outcomes of forced collaboration may be artificial (Hargreaves, 1994). Nevertheless participants were clear that traditional schooling and teacher-centered classroom instruction discourages interaction among students, and thereby hinders the development of independent thinking and problem solving. The collaborative nature of teaching and learning is reflected in Margaret’s viewpoint:

I see children in classrooms, they used to sit at a desk-the child was isolated, the teacher was isolated. But now they work in groups and it’s a whole different way of expressing yourself and getting respect for somebody else’s opinion earlier on in life and sharing. I think that with the sharing process, starting out in kindergarten and it continues to flourish, that we’ll be a better society and we’ll learn at a better rate. We’ll be able to share and not just be isolated with our own ideas.

These sentiments expressed so clearly by a parent and shared by other stakeholders in the group echo the recent literature written on the importance of understanding education in new ways that are appropriate to today’s dynamic and complex world (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Mclaughlin, 1997).
Finally participants agreed that the current emphasis on collaboration in the business world is a call for us to do the same in schools. In other words schools are following the example of the corporate world as we both search for new ways to structure our work. Adele noted that “anything business brings in, we fall into place after and try to stumble through it in our own way, often times with not enough training – the kind of training that’s given in corporations.” Adele’s notion that schools are lagging behind business in the successful implementation of collaboration is supported by Fullan (1999) who stated that “compared to businesses, school systems are mired in inertial bureaucracy” (p. 39). As both schools and business adapt to new forms of management and governance in the struggle for survival, collaboration becomes an integral component of working in different ways. As Ann indicated, “when you look at the workplace section of the newspaper it seems like they do a lot of articles on collaboration and coaching teams.” Similarly according to Marly, parents who are in the business world say: “I’m really glad you’re teaching the team approach and collaboration because that’s what I’m facing now and I’ve never experienced doing that in my schooling and even now in the business world.” In fact many parents recall the time in schools when collaboration was called cheating (Handy, 1990).

In summary choice is one of the themes related to Subsidiary Question 1 (a) “How has the collaborative relationship developed?” I first discussed what choice in collaboration means to participants and the extent to which it is important in the development of the collaborative relationship. Next in the section entitled “Why Collaborate?” I explored participant perspectives on the collaborative movement that often have an impact on what participants described as the essential voluntary nature of
collaboration. Participants identified a focus on the democratic process, changes in structure in schools and society, new understandings in teaching and learning, and the influence of the business world as conditions that are fueling and at times forcing them to collaborate. Next, I will introduce the other themes including goals, need and relationships that emerged in participant discussion about the conditions that foster collaboration.

**Goals**

Many participants agreed that having a common goal was instrumental in the formation of their collaborative relationship. Furthermore they indicated that in order to be successful, decision making and shared involvement must be strongly linked to clearly defined and shared goals and purposes. As Susan explained “I think it’s very important for everybody to know the goal and to subscribe to the goal. That goal, right at the top, that’s what we’re all working toward.” Jean agreed, “you have to have a reason. If the reason is sound, we want to collaborate for this purpose, for the good of the children or school to achieve French immersion – that’s required. That makes it happen.” Ann talked about “purpose, intention, what we’re collaborating about. You know, that articulation of what we’re doing and how the process will work.” According to participants a common goal is what binds people together in their work and enables them to achieve positive outcomes. This view is in accordance with the theoretical writing of Little (1990) and Sergiovanni (1994) who indicated that the acceptance of common purpose or shared goals contributes to a sense of bonding among individuals that results in a mutual commitment to each other to achieve the goal. Ann’s experience as a principal speaks to her commitment to shared purpose in the work in her school. “ We deliver the work best
when we’re all believing in what we say and what we do.” Handy (1996) further cautioned that if there isn’t a common goal, people will put their own goals first. Indeed participants in this study described working together in situations in which another individual’s “agenda” led to “fake collaboration” and resulted in outcomes that were superficial and not authentic.

That said, participants did recognize that as Susan mentioned, “there is that common goal, but everybody brings to the table their own set of goals in which to achieve their particular piece of the puzzle.” From the parent’s perspective, Margaret’s story of her collaborative experience in her school demonstrates how personal goals fit into the bigger picture of school purpose.

A collaboration that came to mind first was when the whole school did a project. The school put on an opera and there was such ownership and pride from every child because they either did the set or lighting or were part of the cast or they even wrote the opera themselves. I was helping doing set design – working with the children. The best part was seeing how when we faltered and then with a little bit of help—“Oh look what you did, oh you really did well,” patting the other children on the back, you could all see the work coming together. The energy in that school was unbelievable—not only did they learn a lot about stage and music, but they learned how to work together and how to work as a community together.

In Margaret’s story, everyone had a goal related to his or her piece of the puzzle in terms of the overall goal of putting on an opera. Elizabeth, sharing her administrative perspective, also used the metaphor of a puzzle to explain: “I am bringing a very small piece of the puzzle and I don’t know how it will fit.” However, through interaction with each other, each group member offers support and encouragement to everyone else which expands individual capacity and improves the group’s effectiveness (Lick, 2000).

Similarly when Jean described the experience of her staff coming together around a
project, she also identified the existence of individual goals within the larger purpose or framework. “Each person had their own personal concern with what am I going to do and how am I going to do this. It was a huge group, and we had a plan, a dream in our head about what might be, and on the night, it is just amazing!” Therefore, although participant’s individual goals may represent different perspectives, participant stories reflect the understanding that collaboration requires commitment to an overarching common goal that gives direction and guidance to the collaborative work.

Clarity of Goals Participants also expressed concern over the clarity and language of goals. Explaining the importance of clarity, Ann asserted that:

> I think collaboration goes off the track because of lack of clarity around the goal. When you start getting a lot of opinions and they fragment the conversation, all these little bits and pieces, if you don’t have something there to focus on, you can go off on these tangents. You have to be able to say we’re making collaborative decisions around this right now. That’s a good point, we’ll jot it down but it doesn’t fit with the parameters of this decision.

Other participants affirmed this concern. As Susan suggested “the goal is written on a piece of paper that you keep in the middle of the table stating that this is why we’re here.”

Most authors have agreed that in collaboration, goals should be mutually beneficial, compatible, articulated, and accepted by all participants (Cook & Friend, 1991; Elliot & Woloshyn, 1997; Welch & Sheridan, 1995). Moreover, although participants in this study also felt that some kind of vision, purpose, or goal must be clearly articulated and in place for appropriate or meaningful decisions and actions to occur, several participants expressed discomfort with the jargon used to describe their coming together in collaboration. In Mary’s words:
I go back to purpose, but I don’t want it to be in this sort of motherhood statement of purpose, because it’s more immediate purpose, a natural part of your daily living.

Consequently, participants not only discussed goals but they also focused on the notion of need in their search for understanding of their collaborative relationships.

Need

When participants used the word need to explain how their collaborative relationships developed, they placed need in a very real or natural context in their lives and work. For example Ken, reflecting on successful collaborative teaching experiences in his career, remarked: “It seemed very natural. It wasn’t something that anybody sort of says – you know, now we’re going to sit down and collaborate. You just did it.” Ken’s experience fits with his assertion that “collaboration is situational” and with Ann’s belief that:

In schools, in classrooms, you have to have room for things to happen, to generate. So to sit down at the beginning of the year and say, we’re all going to collaboratively look at this – I don’t know how authentic that is. The best examples of collaboration are when someone has an idea or situation happens and we’re going to do something about this.

According to participants, need appears to be internally grounded within the disposition of an individual and is directly related to the context in which the individual is situated. Collaboration in this case is a response to the felt and expressed needs of the individuals in a particular situation. The idea that need is internally driven makes it very personal and context specific. For example Adele commented that in a recent collaborative situation she experienced, there was a need to plan a conference but there was also a need “for myself to grow through that group with connections and knowledge.” Similarly Susan described the need to achieve a school goal of literacy and her “wanting to be in a
team situation, but being in a school that didn’t really lend itself physically to that.”

Commenting on the personal nature of collaboration that gives rise to need, motivation, and desire to be involved Ken explained:

> What works and what might be called collaboration in Ann’s school in situation A, might by the perception of the people in my school, in a similar, not identical because they seldom are, but a similar situation, not be construed as collaboration because it becomes not only situational, but personal.

Participants’ description of the notion of need in collaboration becomes an important theme in light of recent research in the areas of interprofessional education. Knapp, Barnard, Gehrke, and Teather (1998) proposed a curriculum design in which professionals are “taught” to collaborate through the immediate personal experience of trying to make collaboration work to address a recognized real need (p. 37). Therefore need is both personal and contextual and often leads to collaboration. As Ken and others in the study have mentioned, “collaboration is something you have to live.” Moreover, this understanding of the experiential nature of collaboration is in accordance with the research of Knapp et al. (1999) who have examined how collaboration might be learned in real-life settings.

**Relationships**

Participants felt strongly that collaboration comes out of relationships. Authors such as Darling-Hammond (1993) and Sergiovanni (1994) are in agreement with these participants and have argued that to be responsive schools must be caring and personal communities where relationships are encouraged and nurtured. Furthermore participants insisted that these relationships must be built. As Ken pointedly declared: “You can’t sort of dump somebody in, whether it’s a new administrator, Susan, or whatever – you
can't dump them in and expect that collaboration to just happen” (finger snap). Susan for her part concurred that, “Yes, you have to build those relationships first. They're the building blocks of collaboration, just as you say. It doesn’t matter if that’s relationships of the administration or relationships of teachers – if you don’t have it, collaboration isn’t going to take place.” The importance of principals developing networks of relationships is documented in the literature, especially as related to restructuring and change (Goldman et al., 1993; Prestine, 1991). Particularly relevant in this study is the insight that participants provided as to how their personal collaborative relationships developed.

First inherent in Ken’s observation that collaboration does not “just happen” is the realization that time is a factor in the evolution of a relationship. For example building on Ken’s statement, Elizabeth, an assistant principal, described her experience with two different principals in one year:

The first thing that happened was the relationship was built. One principal in particular made it her job to spend a lot of time in the first little while getting to know people really, really well. Getting to know them personally, but then getting to know them professionally as well.

Second, as articulated by Elizabeth and reinforced by several other participants is the importance of ‘knowing people’ in order to form a relationship. Ken elaborated on the theme of knowing people and its connection to relationships and collaboration in this way:

Collaboration comes out of relationships because you work closely together. You get to know people, maybe not on a real personal level, but certainly on a working level, and that’s not to mean that you maybe aren’t personal with those people, because in many cases you are. But it’s a close working relationship. So when you develop that relationship and find out about those people you want to work together because you value their opinions, and skill or you value their knowledge. You want to put it
all together and derive something more prominent, so the relationships are crucial.

Another principal, Marly, shared her experience in teaming: “I think of the team partners I’ve had, they know everything about me from what I like to eat, from how my weekend is, they could tell you right now what my family is doing because they know me.” Conversely, Marly talked about not having the time to talk with her assistant principal which resulted in a “forced relationship, where the others were more natural.”

The theme of knowing people echoed in the voices of many participants including parents who described the importance of relationships to their collaborative work on school council. Dorothy offered her experience in building relationships in this larger group:

As chair of my council I try never to forget anyone who comes to any of our meetings. I always try to remember their names. If I see them in the school or later on, I always address them by their name and somehow connect with which child is which. If only to just tell them, hey, we did this or we did that, so that they know they’ve been there, and now they are part of the group.

Knowing people is crucial in developing the trust and respect that characterizes collaborative relationships. Handy (1996) maintained that trust means knowing others well and talking with them constantly (p. 187). As well, participant sentiments and comments on the importance of knowing people as a useful method for developing relationships are consistent with the research of Riccardi and Kurtz (1983) who introduced the concept of “mutually understood common ground” to explain the formation of relationships. According to Riccardi and Kurtz, as individuals share time and experiences together and reveal their backgrounds, interests, and beliefs to each other through communication, they establish common ground that is needed in the development of trust and relationship.
Another side to the discussion concerning “knowing others” was presented by a parent. Elizabeth offered this perspective: “It can work both ways. I’ve had to collaborate with people whom I didn’t know before hand in any kind of relationship. By collaborating a relationship and respect did develop. It came from that.” In reflecting on her experience that appeared to be different from others, Elizabeth explained, “Maybe I come from a perspective, thinking back to university, where I can’t imagine not collaborating. Like to me, it’s just not an option.” Kerry added his view that “you can collaborate with people that you don’t know, but to start that collaborative process you have to be willing to put your trust out there, to have it tested.” Hargreaves (1994) whose writing has shed considerable light on the collaborative process has expressed a similar opinion that trust may be invested in people or processes. Furthermore Elizabeth’s experiences and Kerry’s description of “putting the trust out there” are supported in the literature by studies that have shown that trust in the process was essential to participants who trusted new organizational and leadership patterns (Christianson et al., 1996; Short & Greer, 1997).

In summary participants generally agreed that knowing each other well leads to the development of collaborative relationships. Ann concluded that “for me, the best collaboration has often been with people who start to know you.” For Jean, knowing people means “figuring people out. Finding out what they hold true and dear and what their values are and their skills, weaknesses, and strengths.” For many participants knowing that happens at both a personal and professional level leads to strength in the relationship and results in positive outcomes in the collaboration. As Mary reflected on the collaborative relationship within her principals’ group she summarized that: “We
know each other. We’re able to form an alliance, work together in a smaller amount of time. We’re able to seize the moment and work together. If we didn’t know each other that would be much more difficult.”

The Dynamics of Collaboration

In this section I present findings related to Subsidiary Question 1(b): “How do stakeholders collaborate?” The focus group questions formed around this Subsidiary Question probed the deeper dynamics of the nature of collaboration. For example I asked participants: “Who holds the power in your collaboration?” “How do you deal with differences in authority and status?” and “What is the hard work of collaboration?” The intent of Subsidiary Question (b) was to focus participant discussion on “how they got that way” in collaboration, in essence to capture movement. Fullan (1999) argued that a limitation of cross-sectional studies on collaboration has been that they have provided a snapshot of “what is out there, and how to get there remains in the black box of collaboration” (p. 33). To use Fullan’s metaphor, in this section my intention is to attempt to open up “the black box” by examining participants’ interactive experiences in collaboration. Participants described several essential constructs or characteristics of their collaboration including: trust, respect, risk-taking, shared responsibility, and equality. Obviously these concepts are all interrelated and are based on collaborative diversity and the multivocal nature of the collaborative process. Participants’ experiences and views that give rise to the categories mentioned above are presented beginning with a description of how diversity shapes their collaborative interactions.
Collaborative Diversity

Contrary to myth, effective collaboration is not based on like-minded consensus. In fact, in this study participants agreed that when they valued the diverse perspectives of others they were able to address and solve difficult problems. Elizabeth shared her experience as chair of her school council: “You have as many different opinions as the number of people in the room. That’s part of the collaborative process. But if they all started off as like-minded people you could sometimes actually end up with the worst decision because everyone came in with the same mindset, the same experiences, then you get group think.” Kerry added the importance of “looking at all the different possibilities,” and Elizabeth offered the following caution: “When you get group think going, everyone says – oh great, that decision is made but there are all kinds of things that didn’t get considered that should have been.” Other participants described needing each other’s knowledge to solve problems. Elizabeth offered her experience in working with a group on a writing project: “Building on each other’s experience and strengths. It was one of those experiences where what you said was taken by the other person and continued and moved further ahead.”

Diversity refers to different roles, gender, status, age, ability, learning style and basically different lots in life. However what matters in collaboration as Fullan (1999) argued is not diversity per se, but rather collaborative diversity. Susan’s experience in a team situation illustrates the full potential of collaboration within diverse groups:

She tended to be random abstract and I’m more concrete sequential. Within the larger team we had a plethora of personality types. It was interesting to watch the different people play off the strengths of the other people in order to be successful.
DePree (1989) referred to respecting the different perspectives of others as “understanding the diversity of their gifts” (p. 25). Participants’ comments and opinions on the importance of valuing different perspectives echo the sentiments of other authors (Friend & Cook, 1992; Fullan, 1998; O’Shea & O’Shea, 1997) who have argued that professionals need to be aware of their own viewpoints and to consider multiple perspectives in order to collaborate effectively. Furthermore, Darling Hammond (1997) described a commitment to communicate across multiple perspectives “as the essence of democracy” (p. 48). Several key issues emerged from the participants’ discussion on diversity in collaboration. Participants focused on time, hard work, synergy, conflict, and respect as part of the complex nature of working together collaboratively.

**Time and Hard Work**  Participants agreed that listening to multiple perspectives is crucial in working together successfully. However several participants also expressed both frustration and caution with regard to how the time needed to honor the process might impact the dynamics of collaboration. As Marly said “We are often asked to think outside the box, to think of creative ways to do things, so it does take more time than just a simple decision,” Describing the work of school council, Laura explained that “the part that takes a long time is hearing what all those people think, and then sort of digesting it.” Marly commented that as an administrator working in shared decision making with her staff, “you’re trying to hear all the voices and it’s not something that you can rush through, you want to make sure you give opportunity for those people who need to think about it.” Having said that, Marly then expressed her frustration at “making some of our biggest decisions at the worst time of year in the shortest time.” She elaborated in this way: “Reorganizing your school, like you were saying Ann, companies would take a
retreat and really spend the whole time talking through it. They do it on a weekend. We do it in a lunch hour or a couple of lunch hours.” Adele offered strong support to Marly’s remarks and added: “I totally agree with that, and that’s why I don’t think collaboration is as successful in schools. We’re just cutting it always short and then we’re offending people because there is no time to explain why and rationalize through it and listen to everyone’s opinion.” Finally Adele affirmed the concern of others saying: “we’re learning this process. But learning that role is so time consuming and it is a lot easier just to be told to do something.”

Under time constraints then, according to participants, important issues cannot be considered with an appropriate amount of thought and deliberation. Consequently in expressing concerns over limited time, participants worried about the quality of their decisions, a decrease in stakeholder involvement because of already busy schedules, and feelings of being untrue to the collaborative process. Nevertheless in this study participants’ stories reflect effective collaborative experiences that occurred within the time restrictions of their personal and professional lives. Although participants would all have welcomed the provision of more time for collaboration, Lynne described “the gift of time that we share” in her regular Wednesday meetings with her collaborative partner. Similarly, the notion that time spent together in true collaboration is “time well spent” is reflected in Marly’s comments about her experience as a staff member in a new school:

We did spend lots of time together and at that point nobody complained about the time. When it’s more open to share, then you’re not worried about the time, you’re worried about the issue.

When discussing the time needed to hear all voices well, participants also described the hard work that is required in that process. The literature is clear that
collaboration requires hard work (Stewart, 1996). This notion is consistent with the views of participants of this study. Jean stated: “I think this participative decision making is very, very hard. Democracy is hard. It takes time.” Lee added, “It can get real messy, you can make lots of mistakes and have to backtrack when things don’t work out.” Ken described the challenge of inviting and facilitating a variety of diverse perspectives and voices in the process.

If you’ve got 30 or 35 people that you are collaborating with, how do you even hear everybody’s voice unless you use one of those – Marly, can we hear from you, Mary can we hear from you. Everybody gets a turn and by the time you’ve gone all the way around the circle – that’s not collaboration either. All you’re doing is making sure that everybody has been heard. You still haven’t arrived at anything more that an opportunity to be heard.

Marly also described the difficulties inherent in a multi-perspective approach to examining issues:

When it’s a large staff and I’m waiting for the 25th person to say their idea and we’re going to go around again, I’m feeling we’re maybe spending too much time on this, could there be another way, still letting everybody’s voice to be heard.

Many participants agreed that skills, training, guidance and support, are required to participate in shared decisions. These are issues that are addressed in the next chapter of this dissertation.

Conflict Conflict is a natural dimension of the collaborative process that brings together people with different perspectives. Many of the issues, problems, goals, and needs that unite people in collaboration are highly charged topics that involve individuals at a very deep level personally and/or professionally. It is not surprising then, that these issues are filled with differences, tension, complexity and conflict. Most participants agreed with
Laura who stated: “I don’t think it ever goes that smoothly!” Fullan’s (1999) view of conflict is consistent with the thinking of participants. Fullan argued that “if you avoid differences you may enjoy early smoothness, but you pay the price because you do not get at the really difficult issues until it is too late” (p. 23).

The purpose of sharing multiple perspectives often results in conflict not only because people may disagree with each other but also as Marly mentioned because people will not “let go of their ideas.” Based on her experience working with school council Laura related the following:

Some people, you may talk until you’re blue in the face and they never waiver from their position. It doesn’t matter how many perspectives they hear, or that they have things presented in a different way – they are stuck where they’re at. So if you get two people like that in a group, you’re in trouble as a rule.

Marly’s experience sheds further light on the dynamics of the process:

In the best teaming situations that I’ve worked in, as soon as the idea left my mouth, it was no longer my idea so that I wasn’t saying “Oh, they took three of your ideas and none of mine.” It’s that letting go, that ability to brainstorm to let go, to place the idea out there and go with a change of it or a rejection of it.”

Participants agreed that issues of competition, ego, and personal agenda may interfere with decision making and create conflict. For example Marly explained:

I find sometimes people come, when you’re saying you can’t move them off, that they’ve come with what’s good for me, not what’s good for the whole. They can’t see the big picture. So you can’t move them because they are so stuck on what’s me, what do I want as opposed to the whole. And that’s really difficult when you get one or two of them and you’re trying to keep bringing it back to what’s good for this whole building, this whole group, this community. It’s extremely difficult.

Ann added her concern and struggle with people “who will hold the fight, or say no, I’m not going to join you. You guys do it my way.” In this regard Mary added the following:
“Collaboration isn’t getting people to do it your way but some people have a hard time with that.” As for ego, Lee remarked: “I think that ego gets in the way and that’s a big stumbling block. The person feels that they have to be noticed.” In contrast participants talked about the need to look at the situation from the point of view of the common good. As Mary indicated, “maybe you need to give on something to allow common good to happen – because our work is larger than that.” Drawing on personal family experience Kerry compared collaboration to a marriage partnership. “It’s a collaborative thing where you give up a lot of your self-interests for the greater good of the family.” Participants felt that working through the conflict that arises when a decision doesn’t go the way you want results in better decisions and enables people to live with the decision. Adele’s comments illustrate this understanding: “When decisions don’t go the way I want, it doesn’t bother me. The only time it does is when I don’t feel that I was given a chance to voice why I didn’t like the decision.” According to participants strategies to handle the conflict and ultimately come to a decision include “letting go” of your personnel opinion or bias and maintaining a focus on what’s good for all.

**Respect**

Respect in collaborative interactions refers to the honoring of the expertise of others. There was strong agreement among participants that within a group they need to feel that their opinions are valued. Susan emotionally expressed her feelings in this way: “I need to know that what I’m going to say counts. Don’t just give it air time. Internalize what I’m saying and let my opinion count for something.” All participants recounted experiences of believing that they were in a collaborative situation and then finding out that their input really didn’t make a difference in the final outcome. William expressed his disappointment in this way: “My voice wasn’t being heard, it didn’t matter
what I said anyway because the administration was going to make their own decisions.” Alternatively Jean described one group situation that she experienced in which “there was a feeling amongst everyone of mutual respect that everybody was there for a purpose, everybody had their own expertise, and everybody’s role was valued.” According to Jean the other people in that situation were gracious, generous, and honest.

The issue of respect becomes all the more challenging in the group dynamics of shared decision making when individuals come together with people that they don’t understand or might not even like. Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) have argued that in working together it is essential that we respect those whom we might most want to silence. Jean’s experiences in working with and listening to all voices are consistent with the advice of Fullan and Hargreaves. Furthermore she explains why it is so important to listen to all levels of the organization or group:

Picking people’s brains and picking from everybody – that’s what it’s all about. The more brains you’ve got, the more successful you’ll be – especially the grassroots people, because they’re at grassroots, they have a particular involvement. You have to tap their expertise – it’s very valuable.

Respecting all voices according to participants means being open and honest. Dorothy offered her view of respect: “You have to be open to everyone’s opinion. You can’t just have a mindset on what your opinion is – you have to hear everyone – be open to all these different views.” Elizabeth, also from the parent’s perspective, affirmed that respect means “people contributing their ideas and their resources to come up with the best solution or way to do something – so people can’t come with preconceived ideas or have their own interests.” Furthermore when participants felt that their expertise had not been honored or respected in the process, they expressed frustration, disappointment,
cynicism, and lack of faith in the process. The result, according to participants is “that you stop giving your opinions, you just quit doing it (collaboration), or you look for another placement.”

Trust

Participants’ comments and opinions echoed the sentiments of authors Cook and Friend (1991), da Costa (1996), and Little (1990) who have attested to the importance of trust in the collaborative process. As Mary explained, “you have to know and trust someone to even begin to collaborate well.” Furthermore, Jean insisted that “you have to build that trust.” Although the educational literature has indicated that trust is crucial to collaboration, it has offered little evidence as to how trust might be developed. Moreover Roy (1995) described trust as “elusive” and “difficult to cultivate” (p. 22). In this study as participants discussed their personal experiences with collaboration they offered insight as to how they or other individuals in the group built trust in their particular collaboration.

Trust is unlikely to exist in a substantial way between teachers and a newly appointed principal. Ken described his personal experience of being a principal in a new school:

When a principal comes in new to a staff and doesn’t know anybody, it’s very difficult initially to make staff your own. You have to work at it. It’s a very conscious effort. You have to put yourself at risk in terms of showing, walk the talk, do the things that you would expect other people to do, be credible. People will start to buy in because they believe that you are who you represent to be.

Ken’s story demonstrates that developing trust requires considerable time, shared experiences, and an appropriate degree of vulnerability. Building trust with staff for Ken
included showing people through his actions that he is believable and credible. Similarly Lynne offered that she needed to establish credibility with her partner in order for trust to develop. Lynne described her work in this way: “She had been privy to some really hard conversation that I had with parents of children in her class, and she was present at those meetings – so I think I had to sort of prove myself to her before.” In this way Lynne’s collaborating partner was able to develop confidence in her which in turn led them both to be willing to trust each other with personal stories, experiences, weaknesses, and concerns.

Handy (1996) has written that it is more pleasing to trust people than to regulate, inspect, and control them (p. 212). Lee described how prevailing feelings of trust within a school enable people to do their work freely and without the inspection mentioned by Handy:

Given a job, a thing to do for the school, you’ve done it without anybody looking over your shoulder and then being congratulated or not as the case may be, on the outcome. But being trusted to have done whatever it was that had to be done with nobody coming at you and saying; “Did you do this yet, did you do that, have you thought of this, have you thought of that.”

Similarly Jean referred to the mutual trust established between her principal and herself which results in “lots of freedom” rather than regulation and control described by Handy. Jean elaborated on how the trust was built:

Once she’s figured you out, or even before that, she trusted and gave you a chance, and took a risk, and let you be. It worked well, because if you’re floundering or you’re not comfortable, you will go to her, you trust her enough that you’ll go to her. So you don’t actually get yourself in hot water. She is very honest.
Entrusting people to act on their own initiative inevitably means more mistakes. Mistakes, if they occur, can be learning experiences as long as individuals are prepared to admit that they were mistakes and do not try to defend or excuse their actions. Jean shared that in her experience “when as a group you’ve honestly collaborated and come up with some ideas and then they didn’t work, then as a group you have to learn from that, see why it went wrong without recrimination.” However if mistakes are punished or people are accused, it is not likely that individuals will exercise their initiatives again.

Trust is an essential component of the collaborative process and is related to the interdependent nature of collaborative relationships. When trust is low, the collaboration may be unsuccessful. In this regard Mary described such a situation in her school:

They didn’t know each other very well, and the relationship was such that it was difficult for them to be honest with each other because each one didn’t want to hurt the other person’s feelings. The teachers felt overwhelmed, and got very negative feelings from the experience.

Bishop’s (1999) research also confirmed that when principals lose teachers’ trust, collaboration could flounder. Participants’ descriptions of the complexity of school life reveal that now, more than ever before, high trust relations are needed in working together to meet the challenges of contemporary schools.

Risk Taking

Risk taking is related to the level of trust in a collaborative relationship. In this study participants talked about collaboration feeling safe and comfortable. When the situation feels comfortable because there is a high level of trust, people are willing to offer their perspectives because they don’t feel that others will make judgments about them or what they’ve said. For their part, as Jean mentioned earlier, other people need to
be honest, gracious, and open. As Ken explained, “You’ve got to be in a group that you’re comfortable enough with to expose the inner most parts of your philosophy, your beliefs, and all that. Can I risk this?” Margaret observed “that if you take the risk and sharing works, then it’s just an ongoing process.” Jean added that sometimes “people have to have the courage to say something that might sound silly but lead to something really good.”

Alternately participants described being in hierarchical contexts in which they felt that their voice was not equal or as important as others in the group. For example Dorothy confided, “As a parent sometimes it’s scary going into collaboration with an administrative team, feeling really small, influenced by positions – I’m just a parent, maybe my opinion isn’t as valuable because of who I am.” Jean expressed similar feelings: “I can think of one group, there were people who were far more senior than I was, and I can remember in the beginning feeling very intimidated.” Participants’ comments reveal that when people are overcome by feelings of fear, they will not take a risk. As a result the collaborative process is threatened because not all voices are being heard. Solutions, ideas, and other outcomes become superficial because they have not been reached in a manner that honors all parties. Handy’s (1990) writing substantiates this concern. Handy argued: “Fear locks the organization into rigidity, making it conform to yesterday’s rules which may not be the right rules for today’s problems” (p. 115).

Equality and Shared Responsibility

Participants spent considerable time discussing issues of power and position and the resultant impact on the collaborative process. Many participants used the word
"equal" to describe their participation with others in collaboration. In the following passage Marly's use of the term reveals her understanding of its meaning:

I've been in many schools that I found were truly collaborative. We were equal. Everyone had the same chance to share around the table. Everyone's ideas were valued. It wasn't, let's discuss it, and it went back, and administration came back and said no, this is what we're going to do.

Susan offered her experience of working together in a literary group:

I took the role of getting the literary group together. I initiated it and chaired the meetings, but that's where, that's kind of where the power, if you will, was-and that's where it ended because I was just one of the team, so there wasn't really any power involved in that. You're just one of the group. Everybody is on an equal footing.

When probed further to explain what "equal footing" meant in this situation, Susan described the interaction in this way:

I never got any indication from anybody that they saw me in the role of an administrator, or I didn't see it in them dealing with anybody else on the team. Everybody just treated each other very professionally - this is what I can do for you, what can you do for me. All this give and take.

Marly and Susan described situations in which members of different status participated equally because power was not an issue. On the other hand Adele's experience with another teacher, someone of equal status, did not evolve into a collaborative relationship because there existed, according to Adele, "a big power issue."

Adele described the situation in this way:

While we were both teachers at the school, I don't know, perhaps I came across that way, but I always felt that she was trying to lead any discussion and direct it. I guess you feel that way when someone talks and talks and doesn't let you speak. Yet you are trying to say we should try this, this, and this. So there was a case where it probably should have evolved into a collaborative situation, but it didn't because I really think the other person saw her job as being more powerful and had been there longer than me.
Therefore in Adele’s situation equality of position did not necessarily equate to equal involvement and voice in their work together. In other words their work was not rooted in social equality.

Several participants struggled with whether the word equal was the appropriate terminology to describe interactions that honor and consider all voices but also recognize that individuals have different expertise. Ann explained, “I don’t like the word equal to tell you the truth, because people have different roles – there’s certain things in our positions that we have to do, You don’t have a choice.” Kerry added his opinion that “you’re not equal – you don’t have to be in your collaborative thing, but you respect each other’s roles and abilities to provide input in certain areas, that’s the key, respect not equality.” Participants’ understandings of equality in collaboration are consistent with the significant research conducted by Gibb (1961) who, based on an eight year study of actual group interactions, concluded that equality does not deny differences in knowledge or ability but rather recognizes the contribution and worth of each individual. Also struggling with the issue of position, equality, and respect, Dorothy’s account shows the development of her understanding through her personal reflection:

I think position definitely plays a very important part. For me, if I were sitting in a meeting with the principal and another parent, I’d be listening-this is terrible to say, to the principal, and their opinion first of all. If I hadn’t made my decision yet, I’d be looking at their opinion maybe before I would the equal parent of myself. Thinking that too, before I was chair and sitting in on meetings, I can think of a parent who I admire greatly, who always speaks her opinion and has wonderful things to say. She would sway me very easily just because I see her as a very influential type of person, same as the principal or assistant principal.
When probed further as to the reasons why that parent might sway or influence her, Dorothy concluded: “Maybe it’s the word respect that that you feel toward that individual. Maybe it’s not the position so much.”

Participants considered how position or status may influence collaboration. Kerry asserted that “hierarchy, authority, and status get in the way of what I’m calling collaboration because it sets up boundaries.” As well earlier in the discussion Kerry explained how his council works collaboratively by moving beyond the boundaries of specific roles:

We’re not really very formal in the way we operate. It’s not Robert’s rule, you know. We have positions but nobody is really stuck in them, because you’re chair, this is what you do.

The blurring of boundaries may create issues for participants in terms of authority and control. Restructuring involves not only a redefinition of roles and relationships in schools but also a redistribution of power (Bauch & Goldring, 1998). As Fullan (1993) asserted, extending educational boundaries requires a willingness to relent control and give over power. However Mary, despite her best efforts “to relent control,” described the challenge of working with staff who continued to view her within the traditional role of principal. In this regard, Mary urged that “the personal power is what’s important -- the credibility that you build with people in working through things with them.” (Findings related to how stakeholders come to understand the new role of the principal are presented in Chapter 6 in the section entitled The Redefinition of the Principal’s Role). Similarly Elizabeth talked about “deriving power from earning it as opposed to getting it from an organizational chart.” In so doing Susan added, “it’s almost like you
are redefining power and control.” Accordingly Mary introduced the term “shared control” and explained it’s meaning in this way:

Shared responsibility. When you work with someone, you have to believe that they’re going to follow through, that they’re committed, because the end result means that all own it.

All principals in the group agreed that decisions that are arrived at collaboratively need to be “jointly-owned.” Ann explained her feelings: “When I have the power and I let go of it and give it to staff and empower them, I keep in mind that all of us are going to answer for this decision. It’s not going to be me that gets the phone calls because we together as a group have discussed this.” Ken concurred “that when the decision based on the input and the information goes forward, people have to say okay, that was a group decision. We’ve got to take it forward and say we’re together.” The principal as well needs to have ownership for decisions that are made collaboratively. Susan warned that principals who change decisions arrived at by the group will lose credibility. She advised that “if we did it collaboratively, then the principal needs to support it because it’s our decision.” Findings related to principal accountability in shared decision making are presented in Chapter 6 of this dissertation.

To summarize in this section I have presented findings related to research question 1(b) “How do stakeholders collaborate?” Participants agreed that sharing responsibility either in a two person partnership or in a large group is not easily achieved and poses many challenges. The interdependent nature of collaborative work is based on collaborative diversity which brings together and honors multiple perspectives. Within this interconnected framework of association and processes four themes emerged from the data sources as essential components of participants’ collaborations and included:
diversity, trust, risk taking, and equality or shared responsibility. As well under the broad theme of diversity participants’ discussion was further categorized into four sub themes: hard work, time, conflict, and respect.

**The Content of Collaboration**

In this section I present findings related to subsidiary question 1(c) “What is the content of collaboration?” In the focus group interviews I asked participants to describe their collaborative experiences. According to the purpose that the collaboration served I divided the tasks that participants undertook in their collaborations into five broad categories: pedagogical, professional development, governance, building and sustaining relationships, and collaboration around special projects. Further participants’ responses to questions such as: “To what extent do you want to be involved in decision making in your school?” and “When is it a time not to collaborate?” contributed to the findings in this section concerning the areas of decision making in schools that are shared and by whom.

**Pedagogical**

The educators in this study described collaborations that they had experienced that were directly related to instruction. The content of the work included team teaching, curriculum planning, conferencing with each other about practice, assessment of students, and sharing of resources. The following participants’ accounts provide examples of collaborative work that served a pedagogical purpose. William recounted one of his first experiences in a collaborative group when he and teachers from each of the grade levels collaborated to plan a unit that involved all of their children working together. William expressed his feelings about the final outcome: “At the end, they had this wonderful thing
to present which was really unique. I'd never done that before and now I've done a lot more of that.” Lee shared his experience in planning curriculum with another teacher:

I was in a situation I would call collaboration with my teaching partner, and we were trying to develop some social studies curriculum and think about what kind of activities we would write for a grade 6 social studies unit. I don't think that we ended up with a product that I thought was very good. So the experience was good to work with somebody, but I don't know about the product.

Lee's story suggests that it is not only the final outcome that is important to participants in collaboration – but also the process itself that is valuable. In this vein Lynne called the process a “gift” when she described time spent in collaboration with a colleague. Jean talked about a situation in which she said:

I'm collaborating with a partner, and we're doing it despite ourselves. We thought that we were going to be partners, and then in September we discovered that the way things were going to be, we don’t actually teach anything together. And yet, we collaborate because the personal dynamics of the two of us are just so good.

Overall in describing collaboration related to pedagogy, participants in this study most frequently mentioned team teaching as a component of their work. According to participants, “true team teaching involves putting together all of the activities such as planning, assessment, resources, and actual teaching as a way to work together and build on everyone’s expertise.”

Professional Development

Participants mentioned collaborative tasks that they undertook primarily for the purpose of expanding knowledge and skills. Four categories of tasks were related to the achievement of professional development purposes: coaching and peer observation, mentoring, modeling, and discussion. However participants also reported that
professional development or learning was an outcome of collaborations that served other purposes (see Chapter 7 for a full description of outcomes).

Lynne’s work with a colleague offers an example of a collaboration that was undertaken for the purpose of professional development of the teacher. Lynne’s collaboration with her colleague began when that teacher came to Lynne and asked Lynne to support her in examining and changing her practice. As often happens in collaboration they developed a symbiotic relationship in which each person needed and supported the other. Lynne expressed her feelings in this way: “It’s reciprocal. I get as much from our Wednesday conversations as she does. We’ve been journaling to record our information and growth..” Similarly Elizabeth reflected on her early experience of being in a collaborative relationship with a very experienced teacher. Although Elizabeth did not describe it as a mentoring relationship, recent literature reports that collaboration and mentoring are often closely intertwined (Jipson & Paley, 1999). She recalled feeling “I’m learning so much. I’m not sure that I have anything that I’m giving. Maybe enthusiasm and energy, but that’s it. I learned a lot from her.”

In terms of the development of specific skills needed in collaboration, all participants discussed “modeling” by others as a way that they learned or acquired skills. It could be said that a purpose of collaboration is in part professional development for individuals in order to gain the knowledge and skills of the process. Ken expressed this idea succinctly: “You can’t presume to be able to collaborate, until you’ve collaborated.” Finally all participants engaged in discussion as part of their collaboration with regard to many topics, issues, and areas of content. Discussion is also an activity of collaboration that has as its purpose learning or professional development. Ann expressed this notion
clearly: "I believe in the social construction of knowledge. I learn best when I hear other people's ideas."

Building and Sustaining Relationships

In this chapter, in the section entitled "Forming the Collaboration," I presented findings related to the development of collaborative relationships. Activities undertaken by participants to get to know people served the purpose of building relationships. As well there were several activities within the context of participant collaborations that supported and sustained the relationship. Specifically in collaborating with each other, participants shared the workload, gave each other mutual encouragement and feedback, and had fun in their work together.

All participants described how they shared ideas, tasks, resources, and jobs in their collective work. In contrast when participants talked about unsuccessful collaboration, they commented about the lack of sharing that occurred. For example Mary described a teaming situation in which "I was the only collaborator – I had all the input and all the output. That's very difficult because in a collaborative situation you need and expect there to be sharing of the work." Marly also expressed the importance of sharing as part of the collaborative work: "There certainly are a lot of people out there that you would expect, given all their experiences, to be very collaborative but they're not good sharers."

Participants discussed how mutual support and encouragement within the group sustains collaboration. Oftentimes it took the form of expressing appreciation to another individual as in Lynne's work as part of the administrative team. "I feel tremendously supported by my principal. I realize that in the event that I couldn't be there, she wouldn't
think twice to do my supervision, to go teach my class, to sort of pull the load. She’s
doing all this hard work to support me and I wanted her to know that I appreciated it.”

Finally, several participants stated that collaboration was enjoyable and of course
people would continue to work at something that was giving them enjoyment. For
example as mentioned previously Margaret talked about “having so much fun in working
together on a whole school project.”

Governance

Participants discussed experiences in shared decision making that were
undertaken within the context of and for the purpose of school governance. The range of
activities included school improvement planning, school organization, staffing issues, and
school council. For example Ken explained that he “thinks of collaboration on the basis
of school improvement planning. I think of how the coming together with decisions, the
working out of issues, coming to common beliefs, really is living collaboration.” Ken’s
view that school improvement planning or reform is collaboration is supported by a large
body of literature (Cook & Friend, 1992; Fullan, 1993; O’Shea & O’Shea, 1997; Welch,
1998) that has asserted that current reform initiatives such as shared governance have
relied on collaborative principles. Similarly Laura described her collaborative work on
school council and its purpose in school governance:

I see how far parents have come in schools. We’ve gone from not being in
schools, to volunteering in classrooms, to running school councils that
only fund raise, to school councils that now make decisions affecting the
whole school.

Later in this section, I present data on the kinds of decisions that are shared, and who is
involved in the process.
Projects and Events

Participants shared examples of collaboration that came together for the purpose of an event or project. Adele’s story of working together to plan and organize a conference is an example of such a collaboration. The actual content and activities of collaborations that evolve around specific projects may be similar to the tasks that are part of collaboration that serves other purposes. The content of Adele’s collaborative work in her conference group included sharing, support, discussion, and professional development as evidenced in her description of what the group did:

We all brainstormed to get a huge list. We’ve supported each other and some of us would take up more of the jobs when someone left and others were busy. The group for me has been very successful, I learned a lot.

In summary the activities or content of the collaborations described by participants in this study were grouped into five categories: pedagogical, professional development, building and sustaining relationships, governance, and special events or projects. The categories provided a framework to examine what the actual work of collaboration looks like and entails for participants.

Collaboration about What, and with Whom?

A major dilemma in shared decision making is knowing what kinds of decisions staff and parents wish to be a part of since, because of time limitations, it is impossible to seek involvement on every issue. Participants strongly agreed that not all decisions made in the school are arrived at collaboratively. As Jean explained,” I think collaboration isn’t a 100 % thing. There are some times when it’s not suitable.” Ann’s comments were also indicative of this opinion: “I don’t think that you can be collaborative about everything. There’s just not the time.” Furthermore as Lee added, “I believe that teachers don’t see it
as a big collaborative group all the time.” Jean concurred in saying “my first priority is the classroom and the children.” Mary’s opinion was similar to the others in the group. She said: “I think collaboration suits certain situations. I think in other ways maybe it’s not the right strategy or method to do.” Susan related the following concern: “It’s not appropriate to collaborate on everything, otherwise we’d never get our business done.” Finally building on Susan’s concern, and echoing the sentiments of others, Elizabeth offered her administrative perspective: “Maybe we need to be more efficient with our collaboration. We need to refine. Who needs to be making the decision? Who’s it affecting? Those are the people we need to bring in.”

Stakeholders agreed that they want to be involved in decisions that affect them, their children, or their students. Expressing a parent’s perspective Elizabeth said “I don’t necessarily want to be involved in how teachers teach – that’s their professional domain in the classroom. But I think in decisions that directly affect our children such as programs in the school, general policies at the school regarding discipline, things that are extra curricular I like to have input.” Laura agreed that in her school, “we don’t really have that much concern about what teachers do in the classroom as long as it’s not something that’s terribly negative. But we are very much interested in policies within the school and all the things that affect the overall learning environment of our children.” In this study, parental sentiments about the issues and areas of decision making that they want to be a part of are consistent with authors such as Darling-Hammond (1995) and Hargreaves (1997) who have advocated for authentic parental involvement that focuses on the goals of the school community and improvement or changes that might enhance the learning environment.
Teachers in this study want to be involved in decisions that focus on instruction, professional development including the school improvement plan, organizational issues that pertain to their classrooms, and school policy that relates directly to their work with children. Adele suggested that “it’s important to limit the whole school discussions to the big issues.” However Lee offered that in his experience as an administrator, it’s sometimes difficult to know what decisions people feel should be made collaboratively. Instead he suggested:

It’s not deciding what you need to be collaborative about or not, but it’s about the relationship between people. If I’m on a staff and I’m trusting people, and we’ve had open communication, if they think it’s a decision that should have been made collaboratively, they can come and say, we should have had input. So we revisit, and it works better because they needed to have a say.

Participants felt that there are times when a decision has to be made very quickly and there is not time for collaboration. As Lee explained, "You have to make a snap decision. It might affect everybody, but it’s imminent." Jean recalled that in her experience, “there are some instances, maybe the safety of a child, when the principal just has to take the role of decision maker – they just have to do it.” I think the trick is to make it obvious that this is a time when I take charge, and this is a time for democracy.” William added his understanding that “administration has to make some decisions based on the deadline for tomorrow or the next day so you can’t get the group together for certain things.” From a principal’s perspective Marly confessed, “there are some decisions that you can’t have collaboration on because some things happen so fast that I don’t have time to ask anybody.” Therefore although participants in this study expressed their need to be involved in decisions that affect them personally, they also are tolerant
and accepting of decisions that are made unilaterally. Jean’s comments that a decision maker needs “to make it obvious” as to why a decision was reached in a certain way, suggests an openness and honesty in communication that may explain this acceptance. Elizabeth’s comments concerning how her principal has responded to others after having made a decision offers further insight:

Our principal, when decisions have to be made, you can’t wait for input, has never hesitated to communicate and provide the reasons for the decision. The people who are there, hear back or ask her and are fine with that. And that’s a form of collaboration as well. The decision has to be made right away but she’s willing to share with people why.

Alternatively Dorothy described a situation in which administration did not initially take the time to explain their decision making to parents. According to Dorothy the result was that parents were angry, frustrated, and did not accept the decision. Dorothy recounted the story this way:

The decision came down and a letter was sent home to parents. So the decision had been made and that’s when parents felt they had to challenge that decision. The parents wrote letters, said we need to meet to discuss – we want to know why. We want the decision changed. After listening to the reasons why, a lot of parents went, “oh, okay, we understand.” Had that discussion not taken place at all, there would have still been a lot of hard feelings toward the administration – alot of people going: “Oh, why bother, they are just going to do whatever they want anyway.”

When decisions are not made collaboratively, but perhaps should be, the existence of open and honest communication supports both the acceptance of the decision by the group and maintains the integrity of the relationship.

Although all participants in this study expressed the need to be a part of the decision making in the school, they voiced concern over other individuals who do not want to be a part of the process. Participants articulated various reasons for the lack of
involvement of some stakeholders including time constraints, feelings of not being wanted or valued in the process, lack of experience with collaboration, and not wanting to be part of the team.

Participants, both educators and parents, were most anxious about the continuing isolation of teachers in the classroom and the prevailing norms of privacy that may block the formation of professional communities. Susan described teachers “who are not looking at the bigger picture that we are a community of learners. They are buying into the traditional classroom – you do your thing and I’ll do mine.” Jean expressed her fear that “sometimes they will out and out oppose you but more dangerously those people just drag their feet and I think that can be pernicious and sabotage the whole culture of the schools by allowing you to think they’re going your way, but in fact they go their own way. That’s scary!” To this end, participants agreed that teachers need to be helped to develop a perspective that encompasses not only their classroom or grade level or subject area but also the entire school as a community of learners. As Susan indicated, “I would certainly never write somebody off. I certainly work very hard to help them see the benefits of collaboration.” Nevertheless while some individuals, like the participants in this study, find it challenging and rewarding to be more involved and part of the decision-making process, others more comfortable in the isolation of their classrooms are reluctant to change their behaviour and might resist extra responsibilities. William expressed a similar concern over staff members who do not “buy in” to the process, and who say: “Tell me what to do because I’m just going to do it, maybe I won’t. When I get back to my classroom and close the door, I’m going to do what I want to do anyway.” According to Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) encouraging teachers to accept decision
making roles requires the provision of opportunities and structures that facilitate collaborative work and the development of professional communities beyond the isolation of the classroom. As well participants wondered about how to get parents more involved in the issues of the school. In a previous section of this chapter entitled “Relationships” I presented findings that described how parents in this study attempt to make other parents feel comfortable, valued and part of the group.

In this section I presented findings related to areas of decision making that participants felt should be shared by stakeholders. Participants agreed that collaboration is an important way to solve problems and make decisions – but it is not the only way. Factors of time, immediacy of the decision, and suitability of the decision for the group are important considerations that have an impact in whether collaboration is appropriate. With regard to who should be a part of the decision making process, participants felt that people most closely affected by the outcome should be involved in making the decision. That said, participants expressed concern over individuals who do not buy into the collaborative process either in working with colleagues in teaching and learning or in the larger context of shared decision making in the school.

Summary

In this chapter I presented findings related to the nature of collaboration. The essential structure of collaboration was allowed to show itself and speak for itself through participants’ accounts of their experiences. I began by presenting participants’ views on the conditions that led to the formation of their collaboration. These conditions that foster collaboration include choice, goal, need, and relationship. I situated individual choice in collaboration within the larger context of participants’ description of the
“collaborative movement.” In this regard participants identified a focus on democracy, changes in structure in society and schools, new understandings in teaching and learning, and the influence of the business world as conditions that have an impact on the voluntary nature of collaboration. Then I presented findings on the dynamic nature of collaboration by examining participants’ interactive experiences. Process concepts included participants working together to build trust, respect, risk-taking, sharing responsibility, valuing diversity, resolving conflict, working hard and giving of their time, and experiencing synergistic relationships. Finally I concluded this chapter with findings related to the content of collaboration and participants’ perspectives on the “what and where” of collaboration.
Chapter 5 - Collaborative Skills

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present findings related to Specific Research Question 2: "What are the skills and attitudes necessary for collaboration?" An additional question is contained under this Specific Research Question: (a) "How have participants gained their knowledge and skills in collaboration?" I grouped the skills described by participants into five categories including communication skills, emotional competencies, decision making and problem solving, conflict management, and team building skills. I begin by describing the skill-set included under each topic. Then I present findings related to the acquisition of the skills.

Communication Skills

Given the interdependent nature of collaborative relationships, it is not surprising that participants agreed that effective communication is at the core of the collaborative process. As Elizabeth explained, "Communication skills will always help with collaboration, whether it's the ability to get your point across, articulate your ideas, or listen to other people's ideas." Participants described active listening as well as various verbal and nonverbal behaviours as essential communication skills. Furthermore because participants view communication as a partnership, as Kerry explained "a two-way-street," they felt strongly that all stakeholders need these communication skills. Echoing the sentiments of participants Hudson and Glomb (1997) also identified interpersonal skills, including an awareness of nonverbal behaviours, strong verbal skills, and active listening as collaborative skills.
Participants all agreed that listening is the most important skill in communication. Laura offered her opinion: “Listening is definitely the number one area and not everyone does it as well as they could but they can improve.” However in our culture the role of listening is rarely assigned the level of importance it deserves in the communication process. Moreover those who do not or cannot listen come across as indifferent or uncaring which in turn makes others less communicative (Goleman, 1998). Listening well and deeply means going beyond what is said by asking questions or restating in your own words to ensure understanding. Elizabeth recalled a situation in which she “listened really deeply” and described her actions this way: “It’s a different kind of listening. You really have to hear what the other person said – maybe even hear what is behind or underneath what they have said.” Ken agreed with other participants that “listening is a very important skill of collaboration” and added this understanding: “Hearing is something that we do because we’ve got ears but listening involves adding the receptive powers of your brain to it.” Ken’s explanation of hearing as a natural process in which auditory stimuli are received and listening as a learned skill that involves concentration and analysis is descriptive of active listening. Active listening is most valuable when used to develop the mutual understanding that is necessary to solve important problems. In this regard Susan stressed the importance in trying to derive meaning from what you hear. She suggested that “when you’re collaborating with staff, you need to listen to what the issue is behind what the person is really saying.” Listening to find out the issue is a basic skill that is also used in conflict resolution, an essential strategy that will be discussed later in this section. Kerry summarized the consequence of not listening: “If
you’re not listening, there’s no collaboration and it’s their idea and your idea. If it’s like
that, then you’re going to go nowhere.”

A personal agenda may interfere with listening. According to participants people
may enter into collaboration with a preconceived idea or plan for how things will go or
what the decision will be. In such situations the quality of the interaction lacks an
openness and learning orientation. The result may be that individuals believe that their
voices are not heard. For example Margaret and Susan expressed frustration over
experiences in which they felt that they were “simply going through the motions of
collaboration.” Margaret’s sense that she wasn’t being listened to is conveyed strongly
in this remark “I felt like we were just mouthing the words and that it wasn’t being
received.” Again, participants indicated that people need to be honest and open about
how decisions are made. Furthermore several participants stated that they are willing to
accept that decision making may not be shared in a particular situation as long as the
decision maker(s) is “upfront” about the process. Adele called for honesty:

If there’s an agenda, let’s lay the cards out on the table at the start. I don’t
have a problem with that. If you want something to be passed, I’m very
flexible; I’ll go with anything. But just don’t make me come up with the
ideas and talk to people, if really these are the things you want to do.

Therefore listening deeply, as described by participants in this study, involves the ears,
eyes, heart, and brain and is essential in collaboration.

Participants’ comments reflect both the importance of listening in collaboration and the
underdevelopment of the skill on the part of a large number of people. In accordance
with participants’ views studies in communication reveal a vast discrepancy between the
amount of time people spend listening and the training received in that skill (Barley,
1982). Indeed, the need to develop the art of active listening is evident in the perspectives of participants in this study.

**Verbal Skills**

Verbal communication refers to words and their meaning, the content of spoken interaction. Participants focused on several dimensions of verbal communication including articulation, wording, and an approach to communication based on context. First, participants agreed that articulation is an important communication skill. Marly explained articulation as "being able to say things in a way that you're understood. It's advantageous to be articulate when you put forth the point of view of a question or a concern." Margaret added that in her work as school council chair "when you have an idea that you think might be really important and might really work well for the school, if you can't sell the idea to other people, then it's not going to go anywhere." According to participants, by speaking articulately individuals convey information, clarify critical issues and expand and elaborate on points of view. Second, participants felt that "wording" is an essential skill in verbal communication. As William explained: "One of my words I have here, double underlined, is wording. It's so important the wording we use." Laura agreed with William and added that "mostly I stop more and think about what I'm going to say before I say it." Susan also stated that "choosing your words carefully when you're talking about whatever the issue is supports the collaborative process." Alternately Elizabeth recounted her experience with a colleague who threatened the process because of her inability to selectively choose her words:

She's rather abrasive and always just sort of throws her ideas out at everybody. I talked to her afterward explaining "that it wasn't going well. You were pushing your idea. The way you said it was making people feel
uncomfortable. How can you help the process? Could you perhaps rephrase it or say it in a little different manner?”

Although participants in this study understand the importance of and are skilled in verbal communication many authors including Cook and Friend (1992), Hargreaves (1997), O’Shea and O’Shea (1999), and Weiss et al. (1992) have recommended that individuals in a collaborative environment (like the teacher in Elizabeth’s story) need to continue to develop these interpersonal skills. Finally participants discussed the importance of context in shaping what is said. Kerry described this skill as “trying to speak into peoples’ listening.” As he explained, “You have to figure out where they’re at and then try and speak into that so that they hear what you’re trying to say, not the opposite.” The diverse nature of human interaction requires individuals to reflect more deeply and deliberately on the content of their communication. According to Kerry and other participants “the key is to be very intentional in what you say and to tailor your communicative approach to the person or situation at hand.”

**Nonverbal Communication**

Nonverbal communication, sometimes referred to as “body language” includes a large number of skills related to facial expressions, eye behaviour, gestures, body movement, touch, physical environment, personal space, vocal qualities, and personal style. For the purpose of discussion in this dissertation I use the broad term, nonverbal communication to include all of the categories of nonverbal cues that I have listed, whereas nonverbal behaviour is a subclass of nonverbal communication that is limited in application to human behaviour. In contrast to verbal responses nonverbal responses are seldom acknowledged on a level consistent with their importance. In fact recognition of
the important role nonverbal communication plays in interpersonal interaction is a fairly recent development in communication research. Approximately 70% of our communication is nonverbal. Moreover nonverbal communication is instrumental in conveying attitudes and emotional meaning. As such nonverbal behaviour is effective in reducing conflict and promoting positive relationships. Because we use both verbal and nonverbal skills to form a message, it is important to consider both communication channels in determining meaning in a communicative situation. Adele offered her perspective:

I think you really need to look at the emotions of the people involved and judge not just from what’s being said, but what you can see in the faces of the people involved in the decision.

According to Goleman (1995) “the key to intuiting another’s feelings is in the ability to read nonverbal channels: tone of voice, gesture, facial expression, and the like” (p. 96).

Unfortunately many speakers have limited awareness of their nonverbal cues and therefore are less able to modify them or make them congruent with their verbal statements. Adele agreed “a person has to be astute enough to be able to do that. And that’s not easy.” Other participants also believe that nonverbal skills are essential in collaboration. Lee offered his opinion: “Body language fits in there. A lot of people don’t say anything but you certainly do get their impressions. So being able to read body language is a part of that.”

Nonverbal Cues Although several participants focused on the nonverbal skills associated with body language other participants felt that the nonverbal immediacy behaviours of approachability and nonverbal cues related to the physical environment are equally as important. First, approachability is a signal to other people that they can come
near. An approachable person is relaxed, uses gestures, smiles, makes eye contact, and demonstrates a sense of openness to others. According to Margaret, approachability conveys an attitude that is essential in collaboration. She offered this description:

> Just as long as you know that people are approachable, I don’t think it matters whether they’re the janitor, the principal, or a parent. You can go and communicate with them if they give you an approachable attitude. They will respect what you’ve said and keep it in confidence or act upon it. But you know that there’s an open door and the person is approachable.

Margaret’s description of the “open door” sends the nonverbal message of availability that may also promote communication. Second, Susan and Kerry suggested that cues related to the physical environment also classified as nonverbal communication are important aspects of collaboration. Specifically, Kerry described furniture type and placement:

> I like what Susan said about coming with a round table because the setting and how you approach it does affect what’s going to come out of it. So if you’re sitting at a long skinny board room table with the CEO at the top and he’s talking collaboration, then it’s going to be a little more difficult than if everybody is around the table, or if there is no table. So you get rid of the trappings of authority and hierarchy.

According to participants, being skilled in nonverbal communication involves an awareness of your own nonverbal cues and the ability to read such nonverbal messages in others. As Kerry explained “we become self-aware enough that we know what our habitual style is and we can recognize what the weaknesses of that are and see that there is a need for other styles and situations.” Finally, participants agreed that nonverbal communication has a significant impact on collaboration because of the important role of nonverbals in the communicative process.
**Emotional Competencies**

Goleman (1998) introduced the term emotional competency to describe learned, job related capabilities or skills that individuals develop based upon their emotional intelligence. Goleman (1995) identified five domains in his description of emotional intelligence including: self-awareness, managing emotions, motivating oneself, empathy, and adeptness in relationships.

**Understanding Others**

Participants in this study not only identified communication skills as necessary for collaboration, but they also described experiences which called for a different set of skills—more related to emotional factors. For example several participants expressed the importance of understanding others, an emotional competence based on empathy. Parents in particular in this study felt that working together includes sensing others’ feelings and perspectives and taking an active interest in their concerns. Elizabeth suggested “You've got to put yourself in the other person’s shoes and see things from their perspective, not just your own.” Laura concurred and expressed this opinion:

> You put yourself in someone else’s position and see it from the way they’re trying to describe it to you. Being able to sense how somebody else might feel about it. Lots of times you start at one end of the spectrum and by the time you’ve discussed it right through, suddenly you realize exactly where the other person is coming from, and maybe you can meet in the middle somewhere.

Dorothy’s views were similar to the other parents when she said: “You need to have the skill of understanding where people are coming from, listening to their ideas, and understanding what they’re trying to say.” The close connection between active listening and empathy is evident in Dorothy’s comments. As such different skills sets may come
into play simultaneously in collaborative situations. In this case the artful skill of understanding another person’s perspective depends upon active listening—a communication skill. Clearly the basic communication skills provide the foundation for the development of more complex or advanced skills such as emotional competencies.

**Self-Awareness**

Participants also identified competencies related to emotional self-awareness as crucial skills in collaboration. According to Goleman (1998) individuals who know their emotions engage in accurate self-assessment, and have a strong sense of their own self-worth. Responding to my questioning about the skills needed in collaboration, Ken offered his perspective:

> It’s a skill that a person has to have and I don’t know how you develop it, but you’ve got to be confident that you can expose yourself to the group by taking that idea and dropping it on the table. It was important to you and you’re exposing it to everybody else.

Having the courage to speak out is an emotional competency based on self-confidence, a dimension of self-awareness described by Goleman. For participants in this study the development of self-awareness meant discovering their own voice and in so doing coming to their own sense of power. Addressing the same area of capability Jean added:

> The skills are learning to find your voice, learning to accept that not everyone will agree with you. You don’t want to be criticized too much. You’re not sure when someone is going to clamp down on you. You’ve got to learn to feel very comfortable - it takes quite a long time.

Sharing her experience of the development of this competency, Dorothy explained: “I can be one of those quiet people and before I was chair, I used to be the person that would sit at a council meeting, maybe not like what I’m hearing but I wouldn’t say anything.”

According to participants the capability to engage with others from a position of inner
strength is a skill needed for collaboration. With inner strength, as Mary mentioned, “comes the courage to risk, and open yourself up, and say what you believe in.”

Another dimension of self-awareness that was important to several participants was knowing yourself, including being aware of your strengths and weaknesses. Basically this means that in a collaborative situation individuals need to recognize the strengths that they bring to the group but they also need to know when other people “can do it better.” In this light Jean shared the following experience:

I can think of one group I was a part of, there were people who were far more senior that I was. Once I knew that I was valued for my own role, then I was able to be myself. I realized that I did have expertise, and I did have things I could bring to the table.

As Jean mentioned as a member of a group it is important for the individual not only to build on the diverse perspectives of others but also to recognize and value what he or she brings personally to the collaboration. Lee’s experience reflects the role of self-knowledge in working with others:

I recall one principal who made a big impact on me. We sat down at the beginning of the year and she said we all have gifts and talents. We need to look at what all the jobs are, and let’s do the ones we want to do, and let’s do the ones we’re good at.

Several strategies lead to self awareness including personal reflection and feedback from others. In describing her appointment to the principalship Mary expressed the importance of listening to what other people say about you in maintaining your own sense of self: “You have to be aware of what other people’s perceptions are – even though you feel you’re the same person.” Goleman (1998) is in agreement with Mary’s view and further stated that: “Superior performers intentionally seek out feedback; they want to hear how others perceive them” (p. 67).
Participants understood but struggled to name the collaborative skills related to emotional intelligence. Perhaps the fact that emotional intelligence is a new concept (Goleman, 1995) added to the difficulty. Nevertheless, participants agreed that in collaboration workplace competencies related to emotional intelligence are required, and like other skills, can be learned.

**Decision Making and Problem Solving Skills**

According to Wood and Gray (1991) “shared decision making is a collaborative approach in which superordinates and subordinates work together as equals to share and analyze problems together, generate and evaluative affirmatives, and attempt to reach agreement or consensus on decisions” (p. 140). This definition is consistent with Adele’s description of her experience with shared decision making:

We have gotten together as a group to make decisions not just one person, if it’s done properly. So it only stands to reason that it’s not a one-sided decision, it’s well thought out and brainstormed by an educated group of people who can come up with realistic but strong reasons for doing something.

Jean emphasized the sharing of ideas that takes place when people work together:

“Whether it’s teaching or the workplace you want people to make decisions, problem solve, and be independent. So then if that’s what you’re expecting of them, you can’t expect them to also just blindly take orders.” Several participants referred to the role of formalized school councils and other specific models for decision making. Because, as Adele mentioned, “there are so many different styles of decision making,” most participants spoke in more general terms about what they felt are basic considerations for effective shared decision making. Participants’ concerns about shared decision making
included issues of group size, clarity of process, and protocol. Participants’ comments related to each of these issues are presented in this section.

Group Size

Many participants described the challenge of sharing decisions and solving problems within a larger group. Lynne spoke passionately about her intense collaboration with a colleague and wondered:

If this energy happens between two individuals, how do you create that energy to take place among larger groups on your staff? How do you change it from the focus being inside the classroom to a sense of community for your school? How do you establish that?

Ken added his thoughts:

Many people are confident in a group of 4 or 5, some people in a group of 10 or 15 and some people even in a group of 100. But, at different levels, people start to clam up because they wonder, can I do this, or who cares in a group like this, or can I risk this?

Adele echoed Ken’s sentiments concerning the difficulty of finding your voice in a large group: “It’s easier to vocalize if you’re not worried about being shut down by the whole group. If it’s one person that’s hard enough but I think it’s not as difficult as in a larger group. So I think more skills need to go into it.” Mary summarized the sentiments of participants when she asserted: “You can’t collaborate with 35 people!” Furthermore, as a member of a large staff, she further explained how her school addressed the challenge:

You have to physically switch things around. What we did is we had 4 groups and each group took the same topic. There would be 7 or 8 people around the table, that your voices were heard. It allowed us to build trust with those people because on a staff of 35, you may not even see somebody for the entire week. In a smaller group, you build the conversation; you’re more willing to share.
Although participants agreed that shared decision making enables the group to express themselves, influence policy and procedures, and take ownership for implementation, they struggled with the problems associated with involving all stakeholders in decision making and governance. According to participants, as the group size increases, so do the challenges.

Protocol

Participants identified several procedures that they thought were essential in the protocol of any model of shared decision making. First, Susan suggested that “you need to bring in the skills that go along with professionalism so that people understand the ground rules that you’re working toward. You’re going to do things in a respectful manner because I’ve seen situations where collaboration has fallen apart. It’s been less than respectful.” Three of the principals in the study mentioned that it is essential that the group has the skills of brainstorming and that everyone knows the rules. As Ann elaborated, “many of us like to formulate our ideas as we go, so that goes back to putting the ideas on the table. You’re not looking for evaluation – you’re just throwing out an idea to help build on what’s being looked at.” Marly further explained, “you examine the ideas and figure out which one fits and would be best for the whole.”

William described another procedure in shared decision making that he called “gifting.” He explained in this way: “You can’t always get 100% buy-in, so we use the word gifting. You’ll gift this time because later on you will be gifted as well.” Several participants agreed with William that “gifting” is a necessary skill in shared decision making, but they expressed concern over people who are not willing “to give” or let go of their idea. As Ann cautioned, “Many people are used to consensus and compromise, and
they know that on the whole that makes for a healthy relationship. But there are people who will not gift and I think that can be problematic.” Marly further added that it is essential to make sure that individuals who are in opposition to the group have had ample opportunity to voice their opinion so that they don’t sabotage the decision. In such situations Marly recommended: “it is important for the individual who voices an opposing viewpoint to know that we honored your comments, we really did listen but for the good of the group we went forward.”

Several participants suggested that it is important to have an agenda for the meeting while others stressed the need for facilitation or steering of the process. In terms of agenda Dorothy explained that at her school council meetings, everyone has a portion of the agenda, there isn’t one that’s more important than any of the others.” Marly agreed that as principal she does not chair her school’s parent council meetings. As she explained, “I’m just this equal partner and everybody has the same voice.” Participants did agree that whoever is the chair of a shared decision making situation needs to have the skills to facilitate the process. Margaret described a good facilitator as one “who brings forth some of her own ideas, but also makes sure that everyone else comes together and shares the ideas.”

Clearly the multiple variables or conditions in a given context shape the nature of shared decision making within that group. Participant comments indicate that within an open atmosphere of communication a basic protocol for effective decision making includes skills related to: professionalism, facilitation, brainstorming, “gifting,” and setting and following an agenda.
Participants not only talked about clarity around goals (see Chapter 4) but they also expressed the need for clarity in the decision making process. Clarity includes setting out procedures, expectations, and parameters for decision making so that all individuals who are involved understand how the group will arrive at decisions. Ann cautioned that “collaboration goes off the track because of lack of clarity.” Adele’s story is poignant:

I was thrown into my school halfway through the year and was suddenly faced with this, this, and this (indicating up and down movements with her thumb). This, we were told is collaborative and participative decision making, but it was very uncomfortable. I haven’t had courses in decision making but evidently that’s voting. I finally rebelled. I had a real problem expressing my opinion by voting with my thumb, but that is what was decided. However, as new staff came on board, they weren’t explaining why they were doing it. They had this sheet of paper, this is collaboration, this is consensus – but that’s not enough. Just because they’ve been doing it for 6 or 7 years, maybe it’s necessary to discuss whether this is serving our needs – should we continue, and maybe a quick refresher for new people so you’re not alienating them.

Kerry echoed Adele’s concern for clarity in the decision making process and described his efforts to maintain clarity in process within the context of his school council:

You need to be clear and upfront about your intent. Sometimes it is necessary to cut people off because we’re going to finish at nine o’clock tonight. It’s not that you don’t think they have something to say, but rather you’re clear about the deadline we’ve set. I do it to everybody. It’s not just that you cut off one person all the time; it’s everybody, so that it’s fair. But to be clear that it’s not that I don’t want to hear you, but these are the ground rules that we set up and we want to stick to it.

Clarity then, according to participants in this study, means that individuals have a common understanding of the shared decision making process in their particular school that enables everyone to participate with a sense of comfort and integrity.
The basic skills of communication come into a more complex dynamic within shared decision making as participants engage in the strategies of brainstorming, facilitation, and "gifting" within a protocol of courtesy and respect. Furthermore, according to participants, the prerequisite of effective communication is also a requirement for clarity within the sharing process.

**Conflict Resolution**

Participants agreed that conflict seems to be a necessary part of the collaborative process (see Chapter 4, the Dynamics of Collaboration). However because conflict contains the seeds of breakthrough in the change process, participants stressed that the resolution of conflict results in better solutions to problems and the willingness of everyone to accept the decision. Participants felt that all stakeholders need the skills of conflict resolution which in itself is a strategy that requires effective communication skills. The effectiveness of any model of conflict resolution requires individuals to develop their abilities in the art of communication by acquiring greater knowledge, skills, and experience in the total process. As Mary stated, "In situations of conflict, through open dialogue we agree to let certain things go even though they're not resolved to the point that we would like them to be, but we put those things aside or we agree to disagree on certain things and focus on more important issues." Elizabeth further described the role of effective communication in the resolution of conflict. She explained, "There will be someone who won't get exactly what they want. If the process has been a good one because people have contributed their ideas and their resources and you truly believe it was a good decision, it really lessens that feeling of loss." Marly agreed that inevitably there will be individuals who "don't get exactly what they want" because "to get
consensus on everything is not going to happen.” However, according to participants, when conflicting opinions, ideas, and issues are addressed and resolved through open and honest communication, people are more willing “to buy in” and support the decision. Furthermore discussion carried out in a positive spirit of mutual inquiry with everyone feeling the process is open and fair leads to the best decisions. The comments of participants are in accordance with the view of Fullan (1999) who stated: “Consensus would be pleasant, but actually is impossible to achieve except through superficial agreement” (p. 22). Given Fullan’s perspective and the sentiments of participants in this study, conflict resolution becomes an essential skill for all stakeholders within the collaborative reform context of today’s schools.

**Team Building**

Team building emphasizes the analysis of work procedures and activities to improve productivity, relationships among members, the social competence of members, and the ability of the team to adapt to changing conditions (Johnson & Johnson, 1991). Team abilities come into play anytime people work together toward a common goal, whether in a group of two or three or in an entire organization. As a new principal in a school Ken described his efforts to build a team:

> You want people who buy in so the staff starts to become a group who have some stake in the school as opposed to people who were just there when you got there. I think that’s team building. You start to build a team around a goal and some of the people who were there initially will become part of the team because they believe in the goal, and then you will bring in others.

Marly agreed with Ken’s notion that a group of people begins to come together as a team when they “buy in” to the school’s goals and direction. She described team building as
"needing everybody in order to make a great school with everyone committed to what you’re doing."

Within the context of successful collaboration participants often referred to themselves or others as team players. Alternately they recalled teaming situations that did not evolve or result in a collaborative relationship. Teaming then, according to participants’ experiences, does not necessarily equate to collaborating. The essential meaning that the two concepts have for participants is captured quite simply in the words of two of the principals in the study. According to Marly: “A truly collaborative person sees it as a team.” In contrast, Mary declared, “I was in a teaming situation where I was the only collaborator.” Nevertheless, the skills needed to build a team are similar to those necessary for collaboration including communication skills and emotional competencies. Members of a team trust their teammates and through open and honest communication develop the relationships needed to work together collaboratively.

To summarize, participants in this study named and discussed a variety of skills necessary for collaboration. Based on participants’ experience of collaborative behaviours I grouped the identified skills into five categories in order to present the data. The skill sets included communication skills, emotional competencies, shared decision making and problem solving, conflict resolution, and team building skills. Next I will present findings that pertain to how participants acquired the skills described in this section.

Learning the Skills: Gaining the Knowledge

In this section I present findings related to Subsidiary Question 2(a): “How have participants gained their knowledge and skills in collaboration?” In response to focus group questions such as “What’s the best way to learn about collaboration?” participants
shared many personal perspectives about how they learned to be collaborative. The intent was to discover what learning experiences gave participants the framework and tools to work collaboratively. Participants identified five instructional activities that contributed to the successful acquisition and transfer of knowledge and skills to collaborative settings. These activities included learning about collaboration through modeling, mentoring, practice, training, and experience. The experiences of participants in this study are consistent with the research of Joyce and Showers (1980) who synthesized the literature on teacher education and identified similar methods for skill acquisition. Findings related to how participants used each of the activities as an opportunity for learning to be collaborative are presented next.

To begin, however, it is important to note that participants in this study agreed that the skills needed in collaboration can be learned. As Laura stressed, “they’re all learned skills, while Kerry added, “I think any communication skill can be learned.” Participants’ understanding is consistent with the research of Kurtz and Riccardi (1983) who described communication as learned behaviour. Furthermore basic communication skills such as verbal and nonverbal behaviour and listening provide the foundation for learning more complex behaviours that include conflict resolution, facilitation, and problem solving in a shared context (Hudson & Glomb, 1997). As well, according to Goleman (1998) individuals can also cultivate the skills related to emotional competence.

Modeling

Stakeholders from the four roles represented in this study agreed that one of the ways that they learned to be collaborative is by watching others. Mary clearly articulated her sentiments on the power of positive modeling: “Models are important to all of us. We
learn from modeling in different ways. We’re always learning from each other when we see something.” Participants were in agreement that in learning a new behaviour, having access to someone who exemplifies the competence or skill at its best is immensely helpful. Moreover although several participants mentioned that they had learned behaviours from high status people in the organization, others indicated that any individual within a group may embody collaborative competencies. For example Marly, now a principal herself, recalled having worked with and learned from some wonderful administrators that were collaborative. She explained: “Twenty years ago they were great people and they have gone on within our board to some very high powered positions because that’s the nature that they are – they can collaborate very well.” On the other hand Susan offered her opinion that “you learn these skills through modeling from administration, but also from your colleagues.” Speaking from a parent’s perspective, Kerry confirmed: “It’s not just the principal who has to model that. It has to be part of the rest of the school council. You model it yourself within the chair or the executive. There are lots of people on the staff who are good communicators.” Adele agreed that in her experience she had acquired skills through “the modeling from other people within the group who aren’t leaders or administrators.” She further suggested that it is important “to pick up those people who are skilled and use them as co-chairs or alternate chairs. Let someone else take it and establish some good techniques.” Furthermore several participants felt that “watching others” may also teach you what not to do. Laura recounted her experience in learning the role and responsibilities involved as chair of her school council:
I learned a lot watching other chair people. Sitting back as a parent at meetings and listening to how things were handled. I learned a lot from the previous people who had the role – positive and negative. Some of the things I saw I have tried very hard never to do.

Modeling involves setting an example. Individuals who have strongly developed communication skills are good role models simply because of who they are and the way they behave. Nothing communicates more clearly than what a person does. Participants in this study recognized the importance of good modeling in the acquisition of their personal skills. In fact according to several participants, lack of exposure to effective modeling of collaboration may result in the continuation of isolated models of work in schools. As William explained:

When you have teachers who have never had the collaborative process modeled for them, they are quite shocked that you want the input. They’re used to being fed, everything is on the plate, given to them. They just want the administrator to make a decision. They don’t want to be a part of it – just tell us. They don’t want to have to sit through meetings.

Modeling of collaboration can take place naturally in the day-to-day interactions within a group of people in an organization. Furthermore within the school context the effective modeling of collaboration provides the opportunity not only for adults but also for children to learn to work together in collaborative ways. Parents and educators were in agreement, as Susan mentioned, “that it’s important that kids are collaborative as well.” Margaret supported the importance of providing a strong model for children. She stated, “As individual parents, we are role models for our children.” Susan agreed that it is difficult to teach children to be collaborative without modeling or being collaborative yourself. She explained:

I think it’s important to be collaborative in my school and the staff to be collaborative, but I need to be collaborative in my classroom. Do I have a
collaborative classroom or are my kids sitting in rows isolated? Are they working in groups? Are they collaborating?

Consistent with the views of participants in this study, researchers have proposed formats for teaching collaboration that require individuals in instructional positions to model collaborative interaction themselves. In so doing instructors provide a model for what the course or training itself requires of the students (Hudson & Glomb, 1997; Karasoff, 1999; Knapp et al., 1994).

**Practice**

Several participants agreed that they developed their collaborative skills through repetition and review. For example sharing her administrative perspective Elizabeth commented that “over many, many years you begin to refine those skills with lots and lots of practice.” Similarly Marly felt that “the opportunity to practice collaboration with peers” contributed to her understanding and skill development. Within the context of practice participants described “trial and error” and “learning from mistakes” as important experiences. As Laura explained, “the more you do, the better you get at it.” Participant views are consistent with current theory in communication that states that as with other skills, considerable repetition and reiteration is needed in order to develop basic communication skills to their maximum potential (Riccardi & Kurtz, 1983). Furthermore with repeated chances to practice a skill over an extended period of time, Elizabeth added her view that “communication skills become more natural.”

Participants from two different roles described their experience of practicing collaboration in a controlled situation. As a beginning teacher Elizabeth recalled learning about collaboration through a planned role playing situation.” This was in the good old
days when there were such things as a workshop for new teachers. We actually did role plays. If this is a difficult person and you’re trying to collaborate, what do you do?” As chair of her parent school council Laura also said: “I’ve attended workshops where you put yourself into a situation and you learn not do that, or you learn how to get around that, or how you’re going to deal with that person because you know they haven’t changed since that last meeting.” In the experience of these two participants, role plays enabled them to spend time practicing the skills rather than merely talking about the competence. In this way they were able to move beyond conceptualization of a skill such as empathy or listening and move into doing or practice.

Participants in this study practiced their collaborative skills in either simulated or actual interpersonal situations. According to participants the continuing development of skills requires practice to build on skills already attained and to experiment with more complex concepts and skills. The issue of training, or preparation for collaboration, is related to practice, and is presented in the next section.

**Training**

Although participants in this study felt that it is important to learn about and develop skills in collaboration, they expressed concern with models of learning that focus on training people to be collaborative. Participants worried about training that occurs as externally-provided support for collaboration and does not consider individual background, experience, and context. Susan cautioned that “you can take courses on collaboration, but the problem is if you start to teach this, you get a checklist thing going and it becomes stilted. It doesn’t flow nicely.” Adele concurred and added “that’s exactly what happens, you get that step by step as if someone has been trained and has not
really seen it in action. It’s not internalized.” Participants’ concerns over standard training programs where everyone goes through a “cookie-cutter” experience are echoed by Guskey (1986) who has shown that training programs must give credit to the individual’s available knowledge and experience. As well the professional context of the individual circumscribes what can be achieved through training.

Several participants talked about course work and reading as a way to begin to learn about collaboration. Lee offered his experience:

I’ve taken courses at university and talked about collaboration and how collaboration works. Having some prior knowledge before you try to implement it on a staff is not a bad way of going about it rather than just jumping in.

Ann, also an administrator, added that “there’s some awareness that we can get from reading. However, collaboration is a process. So, therefore, most processes you learn from experience.” Ann’s observation that the development of collaborative skills depends more on practice or experience than on talking about the competence is consistent with Goleman’s (1998) finding that practice sessions have double the impact on job performance as the presentation of concepts alone. Similarly, participants agreed that a significant difference exists between knowing about the skills, behaviours, and attitudes of collaboration and being a good collaborator in practice. The importance of experiential learning in the development of collaborative skills is presented later as the final topic in this section.

Mentoring

For participants in this study, successful collaboration involved reciprocal learning in which “everyone is continually learning from each other.” As Mary explained
"by having collaboration to learn together" participants not only gained knowledge in the topic of their collaboration but they also acquired skills and understanding about collaboration itself by supporting, encouraging, and mentoring each other in the process.

However although many participants described learning about collaboration by experiencing or "living it," only two participants used the term mentoring to describe the mutual learning that took place as they "figured out" how to work together and laid out the process. Two reasons may explain why participants were reluctant to use the term mentoring to explain their collaborative learning. First the traditional model of mentoring is based upon a hierarchical framework of status and power in which the mentor passes on expertise to the novice mentee. In this one-way relationship the mentor is defined as guide while the mentee is in a subservient role. Alternately, in this study, participant recounts of their collaborative experiences were grounded in social equality that recognized and valued the contribution of each individual (see Chapter 4, Equality and Shared Responsibility). In this vein in the current literature on mentoring, authors have used the term co-mentoring to refer to relationships that are reciprocal and mutual in which each member of the group offers support to everyone else thereby expanding group understanding and improving the groups' effectiveness (Lick, 2000; Mullen, 2000; Mullen, Cox, Boettcher, & Adoue, 1997). Second, mentoring has traditionally been carried out in pairs. Oftentimes participants in this study described collaborative experiences that involved groups of people. Accordingly Fullan and Hargreaves (2000) have called for a new vision of mentoring which sees mentoring moving from being performed in pairs to becoming an integral part of the culture of a school (p. 55).
Therefore within the context of their collaborations participants described having the opportunity to model and practice new concepts and skills. As such they served as mentors for each other in learning about and acquiring the skills needed to work collaboratively.

**Experience**

Participants in this study all agreed that experiential content is at the core of learning how to collaborate. Participants overwhelmingly felt that life itself is the true arena for learning about collaboration. As Ann expressed:

*It’s so experiential in learning and practicing collaboration. A collaboration kit might say: “Be careful when you use collaboration this way, be sure to use collaboration that way.” We could put those kinds of things on paper, as they have a thousand times in books. But, collaboration is a life experience kind of knowledge. It’s life-long learning.*

Ken, also speaking from the perspective of a principal, concurred with Ann’s sentiments while further extending the image of a collaboration kit:

*I’m visualizing that you go to the teacher’s store and you buy a collaboration kit and it’s going to teach you how to collaborate. No. We said earlier in this conversation that collaboration is something you have to live. You can’t live something that you buy in a kit – it just doesn’t work. And you can’t live something that you have procedural chart, or a diagram, or an assumed right way and wrong way. A kit would presuppose a recipe because with kits you get instructions. I don’t know, do you put two parts respect, one part trust?*

Participants in other roles also agreed that they learned about being collaborative through personal collaborative experiences. For example Kerry’s comments are reflective of the sentiments of parents in the study:

*It’s just the experience of doing it. And life, I’m sure I’m a much more collaborative person than I was at age 20. At age 20, I was a much more self-interested, ego centered kind of person, but I think as you grow, as*
you get more experience, and as you work more you develop collaborative skills.

Participants’ views that experiential modes of learning are best suited to the acquisition of the emergent and situation-specific knowledge needed for collaboration are echoed by researchers who have incorporated a focus on experiential learning into the design of new interprofessional curriculum for teaching collaboration (Karasoff, 1999; Knapp et al., 1999; McCroskery & Robertson, 1999). Other authors such as Fullan (1998) and Hoover and Achillis (1996) have also noted that the complex and contextual nature of collaboration has made it difficult to follow a step-by-step recipe for implementing the process. Finally focusing again on the experiential nature of learning about and acquiring the skills of collaboration, Ann offered this summation: “That’s why you can’t get the collaboration kit, because it’s tied to a lot of variables.”

Summary

Through description of the lived experiences of participants in the context of personal collaboration, this chapter presented findings related to the skills and attitudes that participants identified as important in their work together. In presenting the findings, I grouped the skills into five categories based on their content and relationship to each other. The skill sets included communication, emotional competencies, decision making and problem solving, conflict management, and team building skills. In the second part of the chapter I presented findings concerning the kind of learning experiences that for participants resulted in the acquisition of collaborative knowledge, understanding, and skills. These activities included learning about collaboration through modeling,
mentoring, practice, training, and experience. In the next chapter I will present findings related to the role of the principal in fostering collaboration within the school.
Chapter 6 - Leadership for Collaboration

Introduction

In this chapter I present findings related to Specific Research Question 3: “What are the ways in which the principal influences collaboration?” As with the other key research questions posed in this study two related questions are subsumed in Specific Research Question 3: (a) “How has the role of the principal changed in the collaborative context?” and (b) “In what ways do principals support collaboration in schools?”

Participants’ responses related to question 3(a) concerning the changing role of the principal were grouped into several major themes including role redefinition, stakeholder understanding of new roles, and principal voice. First I present findings that emerged from participants’ discussion on the principal’s changing role. As well several sub-themes derived from the data sources are presented under the broad theme of the changing role of the principal including complexity of role, relationships and principal accountability.

The Redefinition of the Principal’s Role

Many participants in this study agreed that working collaboratively within the context of shared governance and shared decision making entails a changing leadership role for the principal. As Lee commented:

I think the role of the principal in collaboration has changed a lot. The role used to be more defined. The leader, the boss made decisions and just told us about it. That was the way it was when I started my career.

Jean’s early experiences were similar to Lee’s. She recalled:

The old role was top down. You were the leader, you did it my way, there was a certain way of doing things, and that’s what you did. And the
"drones" did what they were told. But now in the 21st century, we’re looking for intelligent employees.

From a principal’s perspective, Mary added that: “Our ideas around leadership and being more of a leader of learning are very different from probably the idea of the principal that many of us experienced going through school.” Based on her extensive experience as a principal, Ann also agreed that the role of the principal in school governance has changed: “Many communities are used to thinking the principal makes the decisions, and maybe that has been the pattern, but more principals are working collaboratively with their schools.” Speaking from the parent’s perspective and as a volunteer in schools for many years Margaret confirmed that she also has seen a change in the way the principal works with others:

Judging back from when I first came on board in the elementary school nine years ago, now I see that parents are asked their opinion and their advice a lot more. Whether you’re the chairperson, or whether you’re walking down the hall, the principal is always keen to find out and get everybody’s opinion so that it’s not her school, it’s our school, and you are having a big say in it. I’ve seen a big difference and I’m very happy.

Finally Dorothy’s words clearly represent the view of parents in the study concerning the principal’s role in the school with respect to other stakeholders: “The open door policy has to be there. The principal has to be open to what the parents’ needs are and what we have to say. That’s got to be there.”

According to participants’ accounts the image of the principal has moved away from the traditional view of the principal that has been premised on positional power in a hierarchical organization and has evolved to a conception of the leader as one of many creative, caring, collaborative individuals in the school. As Mary succinctly expressed from her perspective as a principal, “the top-down style of leading is not the best way to
go about making good decisions in a school setting. Important decisions need to involve a lot of people.” Participants’ comments about the principalship are reflected in the extensive body of current literature that examines the educational leader’s role within the context of recent reform initiatives such as site-based management and shared decision making. Many authors (Christensen, 1992; Conley & Goldman, 1994; Haskin, 1995; Leithwood, 1992; Murphy, 1994; Prestine, 1991) who have written on the topic of the new school leader have presented ideas and research which parallels the views and perspectives of this study’s participants. For example Christensen (1992) argued that principals are faced with changing their role from one existing at the top of the hierarchical pyramid to one of “orchestrating from the sidelines” (p. 18). Similarly, Murphy (1994) referred to this relatively new phenomenon as “leading from the center” rather than “leading from the top” (p. 25). Prestine, (1991) researched the principal’s role in restructuring and concluded that the principal’s participation with others had to be as an equal. Prestine’s conclusions are supported by Sergiovanni (1994) and Barth (1991) and are consistent with the opinions and experiences of participants in this study who view all stakeholders as equal members of a collaborative community with shared responsibility for decision making (see Chapter 4).

However although participants agree that leadership roles are different under the school based management concept, several participants expressed the concern over principals who fear the loss of personal power and prestige and are unable or unwilling to share control. Adele shared her concerns: “We’ve got some principals who I think still try to control more because of the power thing. I don’t understand how some people get to be in the position of leadership.” As Adele mentioned principals may be reluctant to
distribute power and control to allow all stakeholders to influence the discussion about
the collaborative effort. As well, some administrators may not relish the idea of giving up
their traditional roles for strange, uncomfortable, and uncertain ones. As Lee pointed out
"the traditional role used to be more defined." Furthermore although the findings of this
study indicate that collaborative ways can be learned, it may be that some principals may
not be able to reshape their personally held beliefs and behaviors developed over the
course of a career.

Moreover despite role changes participants affirmed that the principal continues to
be a key player within school reform initiatives. School-based planning and decision
making does not eliminate the need for a strong leader who can spearhead change.
However as principals move away from being the decision maker to involving others in
the process, they also engage with stakeholders in the school in different ways as they
continually redefine their work. According to participants the success of shared decision
making depends on the behaviors and beliefs of the principal. As Kerry explained, "It’s
very much the role of the principal to start the collaborative ball rolling." Elizabeth
agreed that "the principal sets the tone for collaboration." Echoing the sentiments of
many participants Susan offered these comments: "The principal must be a collaborator.
If the principal isn’t collaborative then it’s just not going to happen in your school. It may
occur in small pockets but overall the school is gravely affected." In this regard
participants’ views are consistent with various researchers (Bredeson, 1993; Haskin,
1995; Rosenblum, Louis, & Rossmiller, 1994) who have addressed the meaning of
leadership in participatory management and have found that the presence of strong
leadership that was facilitative, democratic, and collaborative contributed to the successful implementation of site-based management.

Finally it is important to note that role redefinition for the principal implies an accompanying role change for other stakeholders in the school. By implication school leadership has expanded to include teachers and parents as well as principals. Accordingly new patterns of interactions and participation place demands on all individuals to work in different ways. Teachers are viewed as a source of expertise rather than as the implementers for others’ ideas or plans for improvement of practice. Parents are crucial stakeholders possessing knowledge and expertise about their children that are not available to anyone else. Dorothy’s perspective represents the view of other parents in this study:

I think the role of the parent in the school has changed greatly over the last few years. If the principal is not comfortable with parents being in the school, wanting to be a part of the decision making, then there are going to be very negative feelings and poor relationships. I think most parents would agree that they want to be a part of that decision making and feel like we’ve had an advisory role.

Susan described the new role of teachers and parents as partners in the education of children. She elaborated in this way:

We both have expertise. It’s a symbiotic relationship. I need your input and I also need your respect and trust that I am a professional, skilled, knowledgeable, and experienced in the field of education.

Clearly, participants’ comments indicate that working collaboratively has involved a redesign of work not only for the principal, but for all the educational stakeholders. These findings are consistent with the work of Bredeson (1993) who documented similar role changes for the principal and other community members in restructured schools.
Complexity

Participants described the principal’s role as “multi-faceted and complex.” Within the framework of site-based management principals are expected to become facilitators of decision making, provide and share information, develop networks of relationships, share authority with and be accountable to communities, and manage the many components associated with shared decisions making (Murphy, 1994; Prestine, 1991; Weiss & Cambone, 1994). In addition the principal’s role is made even more complex and demanding by the social and demographic conditions imposed on schools by a postmodern society (see Chapter 4, “Why Collaborate?”). Marly’s description of her work as a principal reflects the complexity of the role:

The principalship has changed a lot. More and more is landing on my shoulders. A lot has to do with the nature of today’s parents. We see a lot more of the bullying parent who has forgotten that we are here for the good of all children. They are coming in with a hidden agenda, but we are so welcoming because the kids we work with today are very difficult. They come with complex issues. You would be amazed at the needs of these children. There are new syndromes every day - some I’ve never ever heard of. We’re expected to meet their needs plus the needs that are totally different of six other children and still do it within the budget we’re allotted. So you are truly inundated with always making decisions about what is best for children. And then, you have parents who have certain things they want on the agenda but they don’t see the big picture.

Laura, as a parent volunteer, offered her observations on the work of the principal in her school: “I find that this year, as chairperson, I’m even more aware of all things that our principal is involved in and I wonder how she fits it all in. I try to help her at the school level so that she doesn’t have as much of the day-to-day stuff.”

According to participants not only are principals dealing with complexity within the content of what they do, but also that very work often demands new and different skill
sets that principals may or may not have (see Chapter 5 for a full description of collaborative skills). In fact working in collaborative ways presents new challenges for principals and typically calls for the achievement of more complex skills and understanding. As Jean concluded, “The skill of administration must come into play to either make collaboration work or not.” This view is in accordance with the argument of many authors (Bredeson, 1993; Hudson & Glomb, 1997; Morris, 1998; O’Shea & O’Shea, 1995; Roy, 1995; Welch, 1998) who have stated that the increased complexity and change in the principals’ job call for a new strata of leadership skills that are more sophisticated and complicated. With today’s emphasis on collaborative decision making, principals, and other stakeholders (as previously discussed in this dissertation in Chapter 5) require skills in facilitating groups, reaching consensus, resolving conflicts, and team building (Whitaker, 1998).

Developing Relationships

Findings presented in Chapter 4 indicated that relationships are the “building blocks of collaboration.” Furthermore as a profound theme in this study, the importance of developing relationships emerged again as participants emphasized the interpersonal dimensions in the principalship. Several participants referred to the “art of relationships” as the abilities that undergird leadership and interpersonal effectiveness. For example Jean referred to her current principal as a “good people person.” She elaborated in this way:

I think people skills and leadership and relationships can either be an art or a science. If it’s an art, it’s an intuitive thing, it comes naturally. The people who do it well seem to have a natural flair. They may hone it, they may over the years make it better, they may practice certain things to make
themselves better, but a real leader has probably got that relationship thing with people from day one, and that's really what makes them a leader.

Adele offered agreement that people skills are important for principals in establishing the relationships that are necessary for collaborative work:

In choosing leaders, the main thing is people and personal relationships. I think a lot of people can talk a good vision line, but I'm not sure people can really fool you deep down if you watch them closely, or really get honest opinions from people on their personal skills.

Susan described how her principal worked to establish relationships in a new school:

We have a new principal this year who came with a real strength in people skills. It started right there with her developing relationships with the staff, and all of her good communication skills, and her ability to make the staff feel important and valued and that their opinion was going to be taken into consideration – whatever the issue that was collaborated on.

In accordance with the findings in this study the importance of principals developing networks of relationships is well-documented in the literature especially as related to restructuring and change (Goldman et al., 1993; Prestine, 1991). In working together with other stakeholders to solve problems and to make decisions the principal has the significant responsibility to develop the trusting relationships that are central to the success of collaborative endeavours.

**Principal Accountability**

Closely associated with shared decision making and site-based management is the changing role of the principal in regard to accountability. The dilemma associated with accountability is that although principals are required to share decisions at the school site, they are the ones ultimately responsible and accountable for those decisions. Therefore although principals in this study believe in shared responsibility in decision making and
are willing to share authority, they expressed discomfort and tension over policy that states that the principal is ultimately responsible for decisions in the school. As Ken so colorfully articulated, “Regardless of who makes the decision, when the rubber hits the road, it’s the administrator who is going to wear the horns over the decision.” Given that understanding Ken maintained that “you’ve got to be very clear in your mind as to which decisions you will offer up and to whom.” Ann also expressed her dilemma over the principal’s bottom-line accountability:

I truly look for the day when a person, in the role of principal, would not necessarily be viewed in that position – and then I think you would have more collaboration. But because we still say, in the school life, in all sorts of policies, the principal is ultimately responsible, there is a point when I’m not going to be truly collaborative, until it says the school staff is responsible for it. But our society is not there yet.

Therefore although shared decision making requires principals to share authority and leadership with other stakeholders, at the same time central authorities have imposed a degree of constraint and external control on them in terms of accountability.

Understanding how power is negotiated, shared, and balanced in schools remains an ongoing challenge for principals and other stakeholders in education.

**Understanding the Principal’s Changing Role**

Participants agreed that the principal’s role has changed, but they cautioned that understanding how the principal works in new ways is an ongoing process both for principals themselves and for other stakeholders. As Adele explained, “I think that perceptions of the principal as the boss are changing. If people do still see the principal that way, they start to question why and try to chip away at the power.” Lee offered his thoughts that:
Although the role of the principal in collaboration has changed a lot, it’s really difficult because some people are still holding on to “the boss” kind of vision. I think teachers are holding on to it. Maybe it’s more convenient to hold onto the boss vision when something tough comes up. But some principals are holding on to it too. Perhaps it’s easier in their minds — like I’m just saving people from having to make these decisions, or maybe it’s a power issue.

Lee’s comments indicate that it requires relearning and a shift of attitude on the principal’s part to involve others in decision making. Accordingly principals themselves need to come to new understandings of leadership within their changing work context. Mary’s experience as a principal also reflects the challenge of helping teachers and parents to understand the changing role of the principal:

Coming to the role of the principal, more often than not you are a collaborative teacher, you work with others, and that’s why you’ve come to the role of principal. You expect people will see you in that way. But some people see you in an administrator’s role, which unfortunately makes it more difficult to establish trust and do things naturally. I’m not saying everyone has that “us and them” mentality, but you hear about people coming to the principalship and feeling kind of alone, feeling like their colleagues treat them in different ways.

Elizabeth offered her agreement that there often is not a clear understanding of the principal’s role and suggested that, “Perhaps we haven’t been very good advocates at defining what the role of the principal is in these changing times. Well, what do they do in that office all day anyway?”

To this end participant discussion also focused on how they have come to an understanding of the changing role of the principal. For the most part parents and teachers in this study indicated that they had learned about the principal’s role through observation, communication, and sharing of how principals do their work. For example Margaret offered that as a parent, she has a greater understanding of what her principal
does “through talking and seeing first hand what goes into the job. There’s so much more communication and understanding on both sides. I have a better understanding of what it’s like to be a principal.” Laura added that as chair of her school council, “I am dealing with all the teachers and the principal in our school. They see us regularly, they know exactly what we’re doing, and we try hard to understand what they are doing as well. That makes us all aware.” When probed as to how she became aware of what the principal is busy with, Laura pondered, “She tells me. I think that’s just part of it because I’m there.” Mary agreed with other participants that in order to help other stakeholders understand the principal’s role it is important to share information about how you work and what you believe. She described her experience in sharing her vision and beliefs about her work with the parent council of her new school:

I think it’s important to have the courage to risk and open yourself up and say what some of the things are that you believe in. I remember the first time that I spoke with the school council after I got appointed to the school. One of the things I said was I don’t believe that being a principal is about having and holding all the power. I felt it was really important to know that I wanted to hear what people felt and that I consider myself to be very open and interested in what everyone’s ideas are and value them.

Finally echoing the sentiments of other participants, Lee suggested that the re-education of all individuals to the changing role of the principal is best accomplished through conversation together about “how we’re doing this.”

Principal Voice

Although participants agreed that the principal continues to be a key player in the shared governance of the school, they expressed some concern about how and when the principal’s voice enters the decision making discussion. Principals in particular felt that when leaders express their opinion too early in the conversation, the group generates
fewer ideas, and so makes poorer decisions. Ann described the challenge of participating equally while “wearing the principal’s hat”:

When we’re talking about collaboration – putting ideas on the table, risk taking and all that, when you’re the principal, in some ways you almost lose that privilege. I’ve discovered as principal that sometimes every thought, every idea that comes out of my mouth, somebody takes seriously—and I’m not even taking them seriously! When I was a teacher, I had more freedom to do that, and it’s been a hard adjustment for me to learn that I don’t. But, I haven’t even learned it yet. I keep doing it and people come back and say, “Well you said. I did? And you listened? You thought I meant something by that?” I thought I was just sitting around talking and somebody took it as the bottom line.

Other principals share Ann’s experience and dilemma. Ken offered these comments:

I need to be careful about what I say. As Ann said, I can’t just drop it in conversation because somebody is going to pick it up and say: “Well, she said, and you know who she is, she’s the principal.” Sometimes I think we probably have to be untrue to ourselves to be able to be good collaborators by opting out at times.

Mary concurred with the other principals and added:

A casual comment may be interpreted in a different way. You have to be careful in a leadership position about stating your own opinion on an issue because position can sway.

Other stakeholders also recognize the challenge that principals face in coming to an understanding of how they navigate their role in shared decision making. For example Margaret commented:

My principal is a good facilitator. She brings forth some of her own ideas, but also makes sure that everyone else comes together and shares ideas. There were a couple of occasions when she was quite passionate on something we had discussed previously, but when she got to the meeting, I could tell she was burying her passion because she wanted everyone to collaborate together, to come together with ideas. I admired her for being able to do that because that’s hard when you’re passionate about something.

Similarly, Jean had these comments about her principal:
If she believes in something, mostly she doesn’t tell you. She keeps her views and she listens, and she’ll go with the flow. But if she believes in something that isn’t popular, but she really thinks it so, she will say, this is what I believe, but I’m open to persuasion if you can give me your reasons.

The experience of the participants in this study is in accordance with Goleman’s (1998) argument that when leaders hold back their views and act mainly as facilitators of the group’s process not expressing them until later in the discussion, the outcome is a better decision.

That said participants also agreed that it is imperative for the principal’s voice to be heard in the discussion. As Susan explained, “The principal has the responsibility to lay the cards on the table so the decision is made well.” Susan and other participants felt that the principal’s role in collaboration is similar to other stakeholders in the process, in that within the context of shared decision making and responsibility, principals also need to share their perspectives based on their experiences and knowledge. Susan elaborated in this way:

The principal is a leader, a manager, someone who generally has more experience and knowledge. This is part of their role in this process. If they have a feeling that something isn’t going to work, whether it’s based on their experience, knowledge, or education, I think that part of their role is to let people know why they think it won’t work. That is part of collaboration. Then everyone has the knowledge to make the right decision.

Kerry, speaking from the parent’s perspective, offered his agreement that, “The principal represents the experience and authority, and people want to hear what you have to say and that’s part of the collaborative process.” Therefore participants agreed that principals need to continue to voice their perspectives in shared decision making but must choose carefully the appropriate moment to enter into the discussion.
Summary

In this section, I presented findings related to Research Question 3(a): "How has the role of the principal changed in the collaborative context?" Three major themes emerged from the analysis of participants’ responses including role redefinition, stakeholder understanding of new roles, and principal voice. Under the broad theme of role redefinition, I further categorized the data into three sub themes: complexity, relationships, and accountability. The next section deals with how principals support collaboration in schools.

Leadership Behaviours that Support Collaboration

In this section I present findings in thematic form in relation to Specific Research Question 3(b): "How does the principal support collaboration?" I employed four categories to organize the presentation of these findings including principal modeling, communication, valuing others, and advocacy. Each theme is presented and illuminated through participants’ description of the principal behaviours or actions that are subsumed under each category.

Supportive Behaviours

The supportive leader is a professional who is concerned not only with the talk but also with healthy interpersonal relationships among community members. Participants felt that supportive principal behaviours help to create an environment that is conducive to collaboration but they cannot force individuals who are otherwise disinclined to collaborate. In this sense the principal’s role is supportive rather than directive. Ken spoke strongly to the role of the principal in supporting rather than directing collaboration in the school:
We have a role in collaboration as a collaborator, and we certainly have a role in fostering collaboration in the school. Those two roles are different. By fostering collaboration we provide a climate where people know they are going to be heard, that we're going to listen and the decision is really theirs to make. But you can't trivialize relationships to the point where you can describe how they're going to be. It takes time, it takes work, it takes effort. I don't think you, or anybody can tell somebody that you're going to get along with somebody, that you're going to listen to them. You certainly create the conditions where that can happen.

Supportive leadership is behaviour that reflects a concern for community members and a respect for their competence. Accordingly the actions of principals that support collaboration are behaviours that encourage and nurture the empowerment and capacity of other individuals in the school. These behaviours that include modeling, communication, valuing others, and advocacy are described below.

**Modeling – Setting the Tone**

As reported in Chapter 5 participants agreed that modeling is an important way to learn collaborative skills. Indeed, participants affirmed that it is often the principal who models collaboration for other members of the school community. However participants felt that effective principals also actively model by their behaviours the values on which they strive to build school culture. Therefore when a principal has the belief that a collaborative way of working is the most effective way to achieve school goals and improve student learning, the actions undertaken by the principal must be collaborative in nature in order that these beliefs are seen as being an operative (and not just an espoused) aspect of the school culture. Speaking as an administrator Elizabeth’s viewpoint represents the perspectives of other participants in this study:

> Principals lead by example to be effective. If they lead by example they set the tone. If they ask for collaboration, that’s the first step. If they actually follow through and let the staff follow through with collaboration,
and decisions are made that way, then people will have respect for the principal. People are smart, and will know whether or not a principal truly wants collaboration.

Parents in this study also agree that the principal supports collaboration through directly observable action – preferably involving interaction with others. As Elizabeth explained:

> The principal sets the tone for collaboration and then there’s very much a feeling in the school that we’re all on the same team and we’re all working constantly toward the same goal. If there isn’t that feeling of collaboration, I think the positive relationship between parents and staff will break down.

Participants’ views are consistent with the research of Kouzes and Posner (1999) who have written that leaders in the organization set the tone through their actions which send signals about who you are and what you expect of others. Kerry expressed his feelings quite simply: “The principal needs to walk the talk and in so doing the principal’s message about the importance of collaboration is clear.”

**Communication Skills** Participants identified specific communicative behaviours that principals demonstrate that support collaboration in the school. Although participants agreed that effective principals must have highly developed communication skills, they felt that listening and openness are particularly important in providing support.

Many participants agreed that principals’ support for collaboration is directly linked to their ability and willingness to listen to others. As Ken explained, “If the principal is not open to collaboration I think it’s obvious right off the bat because there’s no listening.” Both Mary and Elizabeth shared their view that as administrators they are obliged to listen to the many different voices within the school community. Elizabeth offered this thought: “We listen, and we allow people to talk and honor diversity in
voice.” Mary concurred saying that as principal, “I am the listener.” However Adele cautioned that although principals may often ask for input, they sometimes spend a greater amount of time giving advice and directives. She shared her personal experience:

My principal never listens. If you tell her something, she’ll interrupt you to tell her own story. That’s always giving your feedback, what worked for you, and not listening and not letting you share. I’m sorry – that’s not collaborative. Furthermore, the only way your staff with that type of leadership is going to be collaborative is if they’re trying to go against you, or they’re forming a counter force to go against that kind of leadership because it’s detrimental to the school culture.

As evidenced in Adele’s story the futility of a telling rather than a listening approach becomes clear when people do not heed directives and the school culture does not move toward embracing collaboration and sharing leadership responsibilities.

Participants talked about how a principal’s openness in relationships supports collaboration in the school. Openness is related to the honest sharing and disclosure of information, both personal and professional. To become fully trusted we must be open (Kouzes & Posner, 1998). Furthermore when the principal takes the risk of being open, others are more likely to take a similar risk thereby building interpersonal trust.

Principals traditionally have held on to information as a source of power and control. Therefore principals’ sharing of information as a way to support collaboration is consistent with the changing role of the principal as previously presented in this chapter. Effective partnerships require that principals share information openly and professionally.

Laura shared the experience of working with two different principals, one more open that the other:

The principal we have now is very open. She tries to keep us informed of all the things that happen, whereas in the previous school, we found out about things that were happening in the whole board when it came out in
the paper or when we received literature on it. You could tell that this principal had already made decisions herself on what was going to be done, and basically as parents, we were just there to do it, or to fund raise for it.

Lynne, in her work as an assistant principal, described how her principal’s openness supported the development of their strong, collaborative, administrative team:

In going into my role this year, our initial meeting was to talk about our families and to see what kind of commitment the job required and the time commitment our families required because of the age of our children. From that meeting, she shared with me absolutely everything in the course of the year. She’s barred no secrets. Everything has been on the table, so I have felt very much a part of the team.

Lynne’s understanding that her principal’s openness supported their work together is consistent with the extensive leadership research of Kouzes and Posner (1999) who have argued that disclosing things about yourself by openly talking about hopes and dreams, family and friends, interests and pursuits leads to the higher levels of performance that come with trust and collaboration (p. 85). Similarly, Jean recounted how her principal’s honest, open, and straightforward approach supports collaborative work in her school:

Our principal is very, very honest and open. She doesn’t play games. There are times when she has to say I can’t tell you, that’s confidential, or I have to do this for some reason. But she’s very honest about it when she tells you she can’t. She doesn’t play politics.

School principals are sometimes caught in the middle between a desire to share information and political pressure to retain information because of politics within the district. According to Jean, in such situations the principal needs to be open concerning information that cannot be shared at that time as well as explaining the reasons why the information is confidential. According to participants principal behaviours that are open and honest support and sustain collaborative relationships and work within the school.
Valuing People

Valuing people means not only listening to what they have to say or contribute but taking their input and using it to solve problems or make decisions. In valuing the contribution of other people the principal supports the collaborative process by focusing on the interdependent nature of their work. Kerry for example talked about the need for principals “to take the input that you collect and actually use it.” Elizabeth referred to the valuing of others as “giving respect to the input.” As Susan explained when principals do not honour and value the perspectives of others, they not only threaten the collaborative process but they also lose their credibility and trust with staff:

A principal may sit back, allow the decision making to take place so it becomes collaborative. People buy into it, are comfortable with it, because they have had their input into it. Then, if the principal says “Oh, now this isn’t going to work and because I’ve got this ultimate responsibility, I’ll change the answer to “b” rather than “a.” That’s where you lose credibility with your staff.

The message in Susan’s story is that principals need to value others by letting go of the control and trusting other people to act in a responsible manner. In so doing the principal’s actions support the collaborative process.

For several participants valuing others meant empowering them to reach their potential. Mary used the term “building capacity” to describe the behaviour that enables others to experience opportunities for learning. Enabling others often means getting out of the way and giving people space to do what they want and need to grow and to be themselves. Jean described how her principal supports the growth of others by valuing who they are:

She lets you be. She lets people do their thing. When she comes around you’re not threatened by her, you’re glad to see her. She’s obviously watching what’s going on, but she doesn’t come to pry. But when she isn’t there she trusts you. That’s a really nice feeling. You feel like a
professional. You feel like your judgment is valued, the things you’re doing are valued. If you’re not comfortable you’re not afraid to go and ask because when you ask, you don’t feel like you’re being judged. You’re really being supported.

For principals, making space for other people to move forward requires having a very clear sense of self. To this end, participants agreed that principals need to be able to let go of their own ego in valuing and honoring others. Marly related: “Collaboration has taught me about letting go. Sometimes that’s very hard to do. To let go and to listen to someone else’s point of view and to learn from them because often I don’t see things the way that person does.” Moreover, a principal’s inability to move beyond self-interest and focus on the common good may be a barrier to successful collaboration. As Lee explained:

Some people have a need to be noticed for their decision. They feel that they have to have their name recognized, and their ego is all wrapped up with who they are and how they feel about themselves. Therefore they have to have a say and not only a say but the say. If you don’t go along with them they are not going to be very comfortable with the decision if they allow it at all. People who get their ego wrapped up, it’s about position. My position is who I am.

Because collaboration opens up leadership opportunities to more people, principals need to be comfortable in the role of facilitator when teachers are leaders. However, according to participants, stepping aside to make space for others may require that the principal have a high degree of ego strength and a strong sense of self.

Advocacy Advocacy for collaboration includes the promotion of beliefs, goals and information about the value of collaboration. A principal advocates for collaboration by conveying the ongoing visible endorsement of and participation in collaborative activities. As previously mentioned, when principals model collaboration they build
credibility because their actions are consistent with their words or they do what they say they will do. However, to set an example, principals need to be clear about their values and beliefs; they must know what they stand for. According to Kouzes and Posner (1999) that’s the say part. Advocacy then might take the form of conveying information on the attributes and goals of collaboration or describing the decision making model for implementation. Adele explained how her principal addressed the building block of advocacy as the group came to a common understanding of collaboration:

Our principal started the year with the whole staff by being upfront and honest about her experiences with decision making and about what she believes is good decision making. She allowed other people to share their views. I think that is the start of breaking down any barriers there might be in hierarchy or personality.

In Adele’s example, the principal and staff took the time to talk about the decision making structure directly, thereby supporting everyone’s understanding of the meaning of collaboration.

Also to be considered in advocating for collaboration are the who and the how. To this end Ken cautioned that “principals can encourage people to collaborate, set conditions that would allow them to have the opportunity but beyond that, it’s how much each one will give.” Participants’ comments that the principal’s advocacy for collaboration helps to support the process are in accordance with the view of Gerber (1991) who argued that effective advocacy puts collaboration on the “launching pad” for take-off in the school (p. 48).

Summary

In this chapter I presented findings related to the topic of leadership for collaboration. I categorized participants’ comments related to the changes in the
role into three themes that highlighted role redefinition, understanding of the role, and principal voice. I further examined role redefinition within the findings of three sub-themes: complexity, relationships and accountability. Next, using thematic form once again, I considered findings related to principal behaviours that support collaboration. I presented the findings according to the following themes: modeling, communication, valuing others, and advocacy. In Chapter 7, I will present the outcomes of collaboration with a focus on participants' descriptions of good or successful collaboration.
Chapter 7 - Outcomes of Collaboration

Introduction

In this Chapter I address Specific Research Question 4: “What are the outcomes of collaboration?” Two additional questions related to the key research question were: (a) “How would you describe good or successful collaboration?” and (b) “What is the relationship between collaboration and school improvement?” Analysis of participant comments to both questions and consideration of the data and findings presented in previous chapters revealed seven themes related to the positive outcomes of collaboration. What follows in this chapter are the findings concerning the personal and professional outcomes of participants’ collaborations in relation to the following themes: community, satisfaction, learning, pedagogy, better decisions and solutions, synergy and school improvement.

Community

Participants felt that the sense of community that derived from their collaborations was an important outcome of their work together. Laura described how collaboration helped to build community and in turn became a “way of life” in her school. Laura’s description of the experience of community that she gained as a parent in her school encapsulates many of the themes related to the nature of collaboration previously described in this dissertation including relationships, common goals, interdependence, support, synergy, and the common good.

When you have a community which is how a school feels when you’re all working together, you have a few parents wandering down the hall, you’ve got one going off to do this, one going off to do that, and it’s all in the same interests. You’re all there to make your children’s learning more pleasant, more fun, and more exciting. The kids can feel that. They feel
those vibes. They see the parents wandering around. They see that all these parents care. Even if it’s not their parents, it’s somebody’s parent. Those parents all care very much about what’s going on and will give them a hand. Kids feed off of that. The children know that there are all these people working together with the teachers, the principal, and I think that it makes for a better atmosphere.

The value that participants attach to community as a way of being in schools is strongly supported by Sergiovanni (1994) who has argued that schools must play a vital role in community building by providing care, developing relationships, creating a common purpose, and fostering a sense of attachment or interconnectedness amongst people.

Satisfaction

Overwhelmingly participants’ comments indicated that they derived intrinsic rewards and personal satisfaction from their collaborations. As Ann and William stated, “There is a feeling around good collaboration.” Participants described the feeling in various personal ways. Jean explained that “if you’ve got that trust and risk taking happening, there’s a really good glow inside.” According to Kerry, “it’s a positive feeling that comes with a win-win situation.” Similarly, Dorothy described successful collaboration as “coming out of a decision making process feeling good, feeling that you have done all you could to contribute and that all people in the group have contributed and have been given fair time to voice an opinion.” For Laura, successful collaboration has resulted in “a really wonderful feeling that you’ve come up with something totally unique.” Marly concurred with the other participants and added that for her good collaboration results in “this wonderful feeling that two different people have come together with different strengths and the differences made us the best that we could be.”
Furthermore the satisfaction derived from collaboration often provided participants with the motivation to continue with collaborative modes of work. As William explained, “You enjoy the collaborative group. You don’t want to go back to being a loner. You enjoy being with people.” Marly agreed that “if collaboration is something that you have experienced and you’re comfortable with it, you naturally tend to go into something that allows you to work with other people.” Participants’ sentiments describing the satisfaction derived from collaboration are consistent with adult development theory that indicates trusting, caring, and mutually satisfying personal relationships are important for both men and women (Gould, 1978).

**Learning**

Another theme was that of learning. For participants collaboration proved to be a rich context for learning about themselves as professionals as well as how to approach education in new ways. Their learning included gaining knowledge and skills related to their role in the school, self-knowledge, understanding how to collaborate with each other, and the development of a deeper understanding about educational issues and concepts. For example teachers in the study recounted collaborative teaching experiences that furthered their own professional development in terms of improvement of practice. As a result of their collaborative work teachers indicated that they learned about curriculum, instructional strategies, and meeting student needs. Furthermore, participants agreed that their personal growth enriched, supported, and led to improvements in student learning. As Jean explained, “Collaboration is good for the children. It’s valuable to get a take on the children from two people. Also you can combine your different strengths in
take on the children from two people. Also you can combine your different strengths in
curriculum and personal interests.” Elizabeth’s comments concerning her teaming
experiences reflect the sentiment of other educators in this study:

My most successful collaborative experiences with other teachers resulted
in a wonderful learning experience for the teachers and the children. We
knew we were learning and learning from each other. We knew the talk
would take us deeper and further into our practice and we saw the benefits
for student’s learning.

Other stakeholders also mentioned learning as an outcome of their collaborative
experiences. As a beginning principal Mary described how important it was for her to
work together with a group of new principals and “have that collaboration to learn
together.” Laura described her personal learning that derived from her collaborative work
on the parent council in her school:

I think I always get more than I put in. You get to see things from so many
angles. When you come out, you feel like you have a totally different
education. You feel really good about it because on things that you might
have been uncertain, you now have a much clearer idea.

As Laura explained, “seeing things from so many angles” or deliberating across
individual perspectives requires an understanding of different points of view. Therefore
differences in perspectives prompt individual reflection, self-examination, discovery, and
learning.

Another aspect of participants’ learning was the development of the skills and
understandings related to working together collaboratively. This learning involved not
only developing the skills and competencies needed to collaborate effectively, but also
gaining an understanding of collaboration through actual involvement in the process (see
Chapter 5). Therefore participants identified learning how to interact with others as an
Additionally, participants again mentioned that teacher learning had a positive impact on children's learning. As Adele explained, "My students benefit from my collaboration." As Susan added, "that's how children learn those skills right from the start at a very young age."

Finally several participants agreed that in terms of their own learning collaboration often resulted in a "deeper understanding" of issues or ideas. As Margaret mentioned, "Collaboration is successful when you know that everyone put forth and everyone came away with a deeper understanding than they would have had on their own." Similarly, within the context of teachers working together, Elizabeth commented that her collaboration "led us to a deeper understanding of our practice. I found it very, very fulfilling in terms of what I took back with me because I was learning from others. But we were also constructing meaning through this." For participants the learning that occurred as an outcome of their collaborations was often found to be intellectually stimulating and challenged participants to think critically and deeply about concepts, ideas, solutions, and teaching practice. Furthermore participants attributed this learning to the multi-vocal nature of their collaboration.

**Pedagogy**

Another outcome of the collaborations described by participants was improved teaching. Although participants acknowledged that teacher-to-teacher collaboration resulted in various aspects of improved pedagogy, several participants also related improved teaching to the overall level of collaboration in the school. For example Kerry described how the collaborative atmosphere of the school may lead to improved teaching:
Collaboration leads to a positive atmosphere in the school. If the whole atmosphere is more positive, then teachers are happier, they work better with children that way, and the children work with each other better.

Similarly Elizabeth also representing the parents’ perspective, described the importance of a positive feeling that results in a cooperative atmosphere in a school. Within this environment teachers and others feel comfortable taking risks and inventing new ways of working with students while at the same time developing a positive learning community. Elizabeth described the school atmosphere or climate that results in successful learning and teaching in this way:

All of us as parents involved in our children’s school want what’s best for our kids. When you have the feeling that everyone has the same goal and you can work together with the teachers and the principal, it’s a very positive feeling, a positive tone in the school. It leads to open communication, and sets a very cooperative atmosphere.

Participants’ views that relate improved teaching to collaborative patterns of interaction amongst school members are consistent with an extensive body of research that has revealed that a professional community (characterized by a collaborative work culture) inside schools provides teachers with the kind of organizational setting that makes continuous learning and improved teaching possible (Little, 1982; Mclaughlin, 1997; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Rosenholtz, 1989).

Better Decisions and Solutions

All participants agreed that their collaborations resulted in effective decision making and problem solving. Furthermore, participants felt that better decisions were an outcome of either a partnership with one other person or a large group collaboration. In terms of the outcomes that result from honouring and valuing diverse points of view, Marly spoke to “richness of the ideas,” Laura described a solution that is “truly unique,”
and Elizabeth pointed out the “creativeness” of the outcome. According to participants searching for ways to accommodate multiple perspectives stretches one’s thinking and enlarges the potential of the group to solve complex problems. Several participants used well-known cliches to reinforce the efficacy of decision making that includes many voices. For example Dorothy described her collaborative experience on school council: “When you collaborate you end up with better ideas than any of the individual ideas people came with. So the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.” Similarly, Ann and William used the expression “two heads are better than one” to explain how collaboration results in better decisions. As William elaborated: “We always say two heads are better than one. You get more ideas when you brainstorm, and they are all laid out for everyone to see. Then you gain as a group.” Furthermore, participants felt that decisions reached collaboratively are better than solutions arrived at by only one person. As Marly explained:

"By talking and going through a process, at the end you have so many more gifts. I know that I would never come up with something like that on my own. Any collaborations I've been in, some of those people became the truest friends after because they're not exactly like me, but we've resolved something. We've come together, and you understand each other a little bit more through that."

As demonstrated in Marly's story and in the experiences of other participants, collaborative solutions have a synergistic quality--an outcome that I address next in this section.

**Synergy**

While Jean and several other participants used the work synergy to highlight successful collaboration, other participants described personal feelings and behaviours
that are characteristic of synergistic relationships. Although synergy commonly refers to how the whole exceeds the sum of individual contributions, Mullen and Lick (1999) referred to authentic team processes experienced within and exhibited by a group as synergy. Members of a synergistic group inspire and energize each other in the process of creating new ideas, knowledge, and problem solving potential. In this study participants experienced synergy as an important outcome of their collaborations. For example within the context of her collaborative work, Elizabeth remarked that “meetings were exciting to go to.” Similarly Margaret added that in working together on an opera in her school, “it was quite something to have children and adults of all walks of life come together and work so well together and have so much fun on top of it.” Lynne mentioned that in her ongoing collaboration with a colleague, “we both feel that we’re energized after our conversations. I’m ready to go after our talks. My energies are then channeled in a variety of different ways.” The positive outcome of synergy perhaps helps to explain why participants in this study chose to be involved in collaborative experiences despite their understanding that the process requires a great deal of time, along with generous commitment of self and energy.

School Improvement

Participants related the previously described collaborative outcomes of improved teaching and learning to the larger concept of school improvement. As such, participants viewed school improvement as an outcome of their collaborations. Margaret’s description of her school as “a place where everyone is continually learning as a result of our work together” clearly demonstrates the relationship between school improvement and collaboration. The personal support available within trusting relationships and shared
purpose makes change and reform more likely than when individuals work in isolation.

Other participants strongly agreed that collaboration is a critical factor in the dynamics of school improvement. Jean offered her thoughts:

I can’t imagine school improvement without collaboration. I don’t know how you could do that if you don’t all collaborate. Why would you think that one person is the keeper of the improvements? One person is not going to be the only person who knows how to improve. Let’s listen to everybody’s ideas and maybe we’ll improve.

Adele concurred and explained that in her experience:

A school can’t improve without collaboration. That’s how we come to agree on a shared vision and it’s how we develop a school improvement plan. So if school improvement is going to take place, then all of the players and all of the stakeholders need to buy into it. Otherwise it’s sentences on a piece of paper that get sent to the superintendent. It’s not lived.

The major purpose of school improvement that includes such collaborative initiatives as site-based management, school councils, shared decision making, and teacher professionalism, is the improvement of student learning (Chapman, 1990).

According to participants in this study their collaborative work has led to the achievement of the personal and professional outcomes (as described in this chapter) that result in or contribute to student learning and school improvement. Kerry’s response to the question: “Do you think that the work you’re doing collaboratively in your school is a factor in school improvement?” echoed the sentiments of many participants in this study: “Yes, I do, or I wouldn’t be doing it.” Dorothy strongly agreed with Kerry that her involvement on school council is for “the betterment of our school and to enhance our children’s learning.” Clearly, participants in this study are willing to contribute their time and
energy to work together in their schools because they feel that they are making a
difference in their children’s education.

Summary

In this chapter I presented participants’ comments that pertained to their
perceptions of the outcomes of their collaborations. Seven themes emerged from the
analysis of participants’ descriptions of these outcomes: community, learning, pedagogy,
better decisions and solutions, synergy, and school improvement. In the focus group
interviews I asked participants to describe good or successful collaboration. Therefore
the outcomes included in this chapter relate to what participants judged to be positive
outcomes of collaboration. Furthermore participants’ responses concerning the outcomes
of their collaborations were strongly linked to the overarching and shared purpose of their
work that focused on the improvement of student learning. Participants derived personal
and professional satisfaction from their collaborative work. Through collaboration
participants were able to develop and experience a sense of community, an important
condition that contributed to their shared experiences and learning. All of the participants
included learning as an outcome of their collaborations. Although the contexts for
learning differed amongst participants, the theme of learning from their collaborations
was prominent. Moreover, while collaboration offered participants the opportunity for
personal growth, it also in turn helped students achieve positive outcomes in their
learning. Within the context of school governance participants agreed that shared
decision making resulted in better decisions and solutions to problems. Finally in
synergistic ways participants felt that the positive outcomes of their collaborative work
exceeded the sum of their individual contributions and resulted in the realization of successful school improvement initiatives related to student learning.
Chapter 8 - Overview, Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Introduction

The preceding four chapters have explored the key findings of this study as they relate to participants' lived experiences of collaboration within the context of school reform initiatives. The purpose of this chapter is not to restate these summaries and conclusions but rather to offer several broad themes or conclusions that are more general in nature. However although I take a macro view toward understanding collaboration and its relationship to school reform in this chapter its benefits can only be realized at the local level of every-day collaborative experiences as related by the participants in this inquiry. In Chapter 8 I outline the major conclusions of this inquiry, discuss the implications of the findings and suggest recommendations for policy, practice, and further research. I preface the discussion with a brief overview of the research problem, the research questions, and methodology of the study. The chapter closes with personal concluding remarks.

The Research Problem and Research Questions

The call to collaborate has become, according to recent research (Cook & Friend, 1992; Fullan, 1993; O'Shea & O'Shea, 1997; Welch, 1998), a pervasive theme in the rhetoric of contemporary school reform. Consequently administrators, teachers, and parents have been engaged in collaboration within the context of school improvement initiatives such as school councils, site-based management, and teacher professionalism. However in the research field few investigations have undertaken to tap stakeholder knowledge and experience about collaboration. With this in mind, I attempted to fill some of the void by describing and analyzing the understandings of collaboration held by
individuals who were engaged in collaborative work in their schools. In addition to the primary purpose of exploring stakeholder views of collaboration, I sought to examine the perception that principals themselves and other stakeholders have regarding the responsibilities and role of the principal both in fostering and supporting collaboration in the elementary school. The central research question that guided the study is: What are the understandings, skills, and attitudes held by participants in school improvement initiatives that result in successful collaboration?

**Methodology**

Sixteen individuals representing a broad range of stakeholder roles in the school (parents, principals, assistant/vice principals, teachers), who were identified using a purposive sampling technique, participated in the study. Specifically, 14 participants (2 principals, 3 teachers, 4 assistant principals, and 5 parents) are from 11 schools located in one decentralized area of a large school district in Western Canada. Three participants (2 principals and 1 teacher) are from 3 schools in different zones in the district. The research design is a self-contained focus group study. The qualitative method uses focus group interviews as a primary means of data collection but also relies on researcher field notes as a supplementary data source.

Each participant was involved in two focus group interviews. In the first interview individuals participated in the focus group discussion with others who occupied the same role. The second interview involved participants in discussion with stakeholders from different roles. The study includes a total of eight focus group interviews that involved 16 hours of taped interviews and generated approximately 500 pages of transcribed conversation. The interviews were based on the same protocol
instrument so that a consistency of focus across stakeholder groups could be maintained. In this study the use of an interview guide ensured that each group discussion covered more or less the same topics. Using the strategy of cross-case analysis and the technique of cutting and pasting, I categorized responses from individuals and different stakeholder groups under each of the interview questions. The interview guide also served as a descriptive analytical framework for analysis of all the data across all of the focus group interviews. The accuracy of both the data and analysis was confirmed by participants using standard member-checking techniques of interview transcripts and of the findings chapters of this dissertation.

Finally the conduct of a pilot test provided the opportunity to "fine tune" the process of a focus group interview and to identify and clarify questions used in the research. The pretest added to the reliability, comprehension, and wording of the questions and strengthened the framework of the research design.

Conclusions

The conclusions presented here are offered in addition to those already presented in the Findings Chapters 4 through 7. These conclusions are broad themes that attempt to capture the essence of participants' experiences in this inquiry and present the findings in a more global perspective. Specifically the four conclusions presented here relate to: (1) the evolution of a better life through a democratic way of being in schools and society, (2) collaborative cultures within elementary schools, (3) a reliance on human goodness to build capacity, and (4) a graphic conceptualization of stakeholder collaboration in school reform initiatives. The discussion includes the implications of these conclusions at several levels including individual, organization (schools), and society.
1. "Life is Collaboration: That's How We Get Things Done" (Laura, parent)

Democracy is enacted in school through the collaborative process that involves stakeholders in decision making in a continual attempt to improve their circumstances. The principles of democratic process captured in phrases such as "equal voice, involvement for everyone, fairness, freedom to be a part of the group, and the common good" ring through clearly and strongly in the stories of collaborative experiences of participants in this inquiry. Because the collaborative process is inclusive, it validates the democratic idea that concerns cannot be resolved unless the diversity of the stakeholders within the organization are included in defining both the problems and the solutions. In using the term "democratic" to refer to their work together participants described decision making in which "you have the ability to have input and know that somebody is listening, and not just a perfunctory function, but your input is valued and used in making the decision."

Participants in this study recount how the democratic concepts of team building, parent voice, shared leadership, and teacher empowerment foster group efforts in school improvement. Furthermore, participants connect their experience of collaboration as a democratic ideal to the larger society where they see collaboration as a way to develop a different kind of civic culture and "be a better society." Echoing the above comment of Laura, a parent in this study, Sizer (1992) maintains that "the real world demands collaboration, the collective solving of problems" (p. 89). Because the concern for a better life for oneself and others is a wider trend in society today (Fullan, 1999), the collaborative process provides citizens with the role in public life that they want by
empowering people, achieving results, progressively recreating their society, and, in the process, finding individual fulfillment and a renewing sense of community.

Authors such as Glickman (1998) and Darling-Hammond (1997) advocate for democratic school renewal and indicate that the challenge for reform in public education is to educate all students to be responsible members of a democratic society. Fullan (1999) agrees that “those engaged in educational reform are those engaged in societal development” (p. 84). Further Darling-Hammond argues that in order to achieve this goal students must be given the opportunity to experience and participate in their schooling in democratic ways. In so doing they gain an understanding of collaboration “as a life experience kind of knowledge” which they then may continue to build on and use as a way of interacting with others in a democratic society.

However if teachers do not experience their school environment as democratic, neither do students. Alternately when teachers and other stakeholders assume important school-wide responsibilities, they take a huge step in transforming their school to a democracy. As a result ripple effects are felt throughout the building as administrators, teachers, and parents enlist student leadership to amplify their own. As Adele indicates, “Students benefit from my involvement in collaboration because it’s only natural that I’m going to allow them the same rights that I’ve been given on my staff.” Similarly, as Margaret explains, “as a parent, if your children see you really involved in your school, my son is now a patroller and does office things, then we’re preparing our children to be people who also will get in there and do it and not just observe the other guy do it.”
As a school comes to look, act, and feel like a democracy through collaborative interaction, students in turn come to believe in, practice, and sustain a democracy both in school and at a societal level.

**Bureaucracies That Work?** Because few schools operate democratically (Barth, 2001; Fullan, 1999) and structure in organizations seems inevitable (Handy, 1996; Hoy & Sweetland, 2000), collaboration becomes a major challenge for community members who must learn to respond to authority structures in new ways and in so doing come to terms with necessary changes in attitude and behaviour in their own roles. The complexity of moving schools toward shared governance and democracy has implications for stakeholders in terms of how they do their work.

Participants in this study understand that it is unlikely that schools will cease to have a hierarchy of authority. In fact their collaborations are experienced in the presence of hierarchy but within a context of mutual respect. Participant stories of successful collaboration reflect organizational structures that enable superiors and subordinates to work across recognized authority boundaries while still retaining their distinctive roles. As chair of his school parent council Kerry explains: “We have positions but nobody is really stuck in them, because you’re chair--this is what you do.” Hoy and Sweetland’s (2000) conceptualization of “enabling bureaucracy” in which authority structures are “flexible, cooperative and collaborative rather than rigid, autocratic and controlling” (p. 529) is useful in understanding how participants in this study worked differently within existing hierarchical structures and experienced successful collaboration. By reaching beyond the school’s organizational structure into the processes and the dynamics of their
relationships, participants in this study collaborated within the context of defined structure but not imposed authority.

As mentioned earlier the traditional roles of principals, teachers, and parents are changing and will continue to be reshaped, redefined, and renegotiated as stakeholders engage with each other in democratic ways that call for inclusion of all members of a group regardless of their position in the power structure. For principals, adopting a democratic “power with” versus “power over” approach to leadership presents a major challenge in terms of their position in the hierarchy and their crucial role in the change process. I next consider what this challenge means for leadership in the school.

“We Have a Role in Collaboration as a Collaborator” (Ken, principal)

In Chapter 5 I presented findings related to the changing role of the principal within the realm of collaborative reform. My intent is not to reiterate these findings but rather to question whether, given the data that have emerged from this study, principals are willing to take risks themselves and to become learners and collaborators.

Principals in this study face a dilemma in being caught between their beliefs, values, and desire to participate fully in shared democratic decision making versus external policy that holds them accountable for decisions made in the school. Not surprisingly, principals may be cautious as to “which decisions I will offer up and to whom.” Since principals are held accountable for what others do, it is natural that they want evidence in advance that those they empower will get the job done well. It is risky for a principal to share leadership. Alternately it may be that because of “bottom-line” accountability, some principals may feel that “I’m not going to be truly collaborative until it says that the school staff is responsible for it.” Discomfort and tension are evident for
principals who wish to share authority but feel a degree of constraint and external control in terms of accountability. However, effective principals are politically adroit and able to satisfy the expectations of both groups, consistently making student-centered decisions.

Moreover, as stakeholders continue to work together and arrive at joint decisions and solutions to problems in the school, principals and other community members will need to develop trust not only in each other, but also in the collaborative process and the outcomes of it. It is only through the lived experience of collaboration that individuals come to understand what the process means and what it holds for them. As participants in this study clearly indicate, "we are learning about collaboration but our society is not there yet." In a similar vein Dewey (1927) speaks of a society in which human beings each with talent and intelligence work together toward the ideal of democracy to continuously reinvent their society. As Dewey acknowledges democracy always falls short of the ideal but the human condition is defined and shaped by the failure and success of the effort.

Another view of leadership that emerges from the data in this study is one of the principal who because of personal socialization experiences, recruitment, or training is unable to relinquish control and lead the school in a democratic and participatory way. In this study a principal clinging to traditional roles was often cited as an obstacle or barrier to "true collaboration." Although the skills to work in collaborative ways can be learned (Chapter 5), it also may be that some principals will not be able to reshape their personally held beliefs and behaviours developed over the course of a career (Schlecty, 1991). In fact the research of Blase and Blase (2000) indicates that professional socialization factors influence the development of a shared governance leadership
perspective in individuals long before they actually become principals. As a result Blase and Blase question whether prospective and practicing principals, without a predisposition towards these attitudes and values, would be responsive to professional development that focuses on training principals for the new realities of the job. In turn without democratic leadership the collaborative process is threatened. The result, according to participant comments in this study, is “that you stop giving your opinion, you just quit doing it (collaboration), or you look for another placement.”

Unquestionably, failure to recruit and develop principals who possess or can be expected to acquire the skills and mind-set required for collaborative leadership will result in the failure of school-based improvement efforts such as shared decision making that rely on collaborative principles and democratic leadership for their success.

2. “You Have to Build Relationships: They’re the Building Blocks of Collaboration”
(Susan, teacher)

Current research strongly supports the creation of a collaborative culture as the single most important factor for successful school improvement initiatives (Fullan, 1993; Little, 1982; McLaughlin, 1997; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Rosenholtz, 1989). The importance of relationships to all aspects of collaboration is a recurring theme throughout the findings chapters of this dissertation. Because relationships are the building blocks of collaboration, they also are essential to the creation of a collaborative culture. Indeed authors such as Little (1982) and Rosenholtz (1989) assert that staff relationships are a major factor in the creation of different school cultures. More recently Uline and Berkowitz (2000), building on Friedman’s research on transforming school culture through teaching teams, indicate that making person-to-person relationships the
foundation of school culture is central to nurturing the school’s capacity for change. Therefore the process of developing relationships, an issue that this study explored in probing the deeper dynamics of the nature of collaboration (see Chapter 4), facilitates the reculturing of schools.

"You Do Your Thing and I’ll Do Mine" (Susan, teacher) Schools, like many other organizations, have rigid cultures that are not naturally responsive to major change. Changing the culture of a school requires considerable time and hard work on the part of all stakeholders in the school environment. So goes it with collaboration! Although collaboration may result in positive outcomes in terms of school improvement as the experiences of the 16 participants in this study indicate, the potential benefits do not accrue without a price. The price is enacted in the challenges that individuals who wish to work in collaborative ways face as they strive to overcome the norms of privacy, autonomy, and isolation that pervade the teaching profession and culture of schools.

On the basis of comments made by participants in this study, it is evident that at one time all of them were “loners.” What is significant is that having had the opportunity to experience successful collaboration, all would now seek out and choose to work in collaborative ways. Collaborators need to feel motivated and energized. Accordingly participants indicate that lack of success in collaboration may result in stakeholders abandoning the process.

There are many barriers to successful collaboration that are described in this dissertation (see Chapter 2). As well the process itself, contrary to myth, is not based on like-minded consensus. Rather collaboration involves open confrontation of differences and the ensuing conflict that surfaces as a result. Confidence in relationships that are
built, nurtured, and grounded in trust allowed the participants in this study to experience the potential benefits of conflict rather than “letting go” of the process because of challenge or complexity. Moreover, according to Fullan (1999), the synergy produced in the process of working together under sometimes stressful and uncertain conditions is essential for self-organizing, site-based breakthroughs or change in complex school systems.

It may be that for some individuals who have not felt the satisfaction from working collaboratively or experienced the other positive outcomes for themselves, their teaching, students, or schools the process is just not worth the effort, stress, or time. In such situations the norms of “live and let live” continue to exist and the working culture of the school, based on prevailing staff relationships, remains that of a “stuck school” (Rosenholtz, 1989) characterized by isolation and nonsupport for change.

3. “People Need to Work Together; I Don’t Have All the Answers” (Mary, principal)

Stories of collaboration in this study tell of participants depending on, learning from, and needing to work with each other in schools. Participants understand that through collaboration they “gain so many more gifts.” They are also aware that thinking and reasoning interdependently requires acts of selflessness on their part as well as a commitment to the greater good. Moreover just as interdependent persons contribute to the common good, they also draw on the resources of others. In so doing collaboration fosters a reliance on the goodness of others to build human capacity and self-knowledge. As Fullan (1999) expresses, “individuals discover their wholeness in a fusion relationship with others” (p. 82).
Sergiovanni (1994) suggests that interdependent individuals have enlarged their sense of self from a conception of "me" to a sense of "us." Transcending self, according to Sergiovanni, does not mean losing our identity but rather our egocentricity. In this study "people who have their ego all wrapped up with who they are" threaten the collaborative process. The implication is that effective collaboration requires that individuals have a strong sense of self in order to "let go of their ego" and participate openly and honestly in the process. However because socialization experiences are different for each person, individuals will be at various stages of readiness and competency to engage in the collaborative process. These differences as well as opportunities for skill development need to be considered as schools embrace collaborative work. Finally a "personal agenda" often accompanies the individual who comes to the collaboration with huge ego investment. In such situations other stakeholders need to challenge the "hidden agenda" which is usually wrapped up in personal self-interest.

4. "Collaboration is Something You Have to Live. You Can’t Live Something that You Have a Procedural Chart, or a Diagram, or an Assumed Right Way and Wrong Way" (Ken, principal)

Honoring the above view of Ken and other participants in this study, and following the recommendations of other authors who have studied collaboration (Fullan, 1998; Hoover & Achilles, 1996), I offer a macro view of collaboration in graphic form not as a set of steps to follow but rather as a story of the lived experience of participants in this study. It is my hope that the depiction of the possible character of stakeholders’ experiences and understandings of collaboration may provide ideas for consideration and
reflection as others conceive and evaluate their own experiences. The conceptualization of stakeholder collaboration has enabled me to represent the large number of issues that stakeholders identified in their collaborations and to demonstrate the complexity of the interrelations between these issues and factors. As such the model provides empirical evidence of the web of interactions among stakeholders in collaboration and the complex path to school improvement.
Figure 8.1
Conceptualization of Stakeholder Collaboration in School Improvement Initiatives
Recommendations for Practice

The following recommendations developed from the review of the literature; the data collected from the participants in this study; and my lived experience as a teacher, administrator and parent are offered for consideration by teachers, principals, school district administrators, and parents.

Teachers

1. Opening their classroom doors to collaborative work may lead teachers to increased satisfaction and professional growth especially as it relates to the enhancement of student learning. On the basis of findings presented in Chapter 7 teachers are challenged to move beyond traditional norms of egalitarianism, isolationism, and autonomy to unlock each others’ leadership potential and foster its growth. Working collaboratively in the classroom and at the whole school level, with a continuing focus on student achievement, may result in valuable outcomes for the teachers involved and their students.

2. Teachers are advised to seek new approaches to mentoring which are rooted in social equality and evolve naturally out of personal need (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000; Jipson & Paley, 2000; Mullen, 2000). Without the expert-novice distinction of traditional mentoring, and in accordance with the findings of this study, collaboration, as a kind of co-mentoring practice, creates a safe and democratic space in which teachers become co-learners who encourage, support, and critique each other through shared inquiry into their practice.

3. Findings of this study indicate that teacher/parent collaborations not only have positive benefits for students, but also that such partnerships actually build parental
support for teachers themselves. Accordingly teachers need to open up their classrooms
to parents and work openly and honestly with them as a way to build parental trust,
commitment, and support for teachers and teaching.

4. Teachers may further develop their abilities and knowledge of collaboration by
acquiring skills through the kind of learning experiences presented in the findings
reported in Chapter 5 of this dissertation. The key finding presented in Chapter 5 that
experiential content is at the core of learning how to collaborate suggests that teachers
seek group situations early in their careers in which they are “taught” to collaborate
effectively through the personal experience of trying to make collaboration work to
address a recognized “real” need.

Principals

1. The first recommendation is based on the findings reported in Chapter 6 that
the role of the principal is different in the collaborative context and that there is a change
in the skills, knowledge, and behaviours required for collaborative leadership. Principals
need appropriate professional development opportunities to assist them in the
development of the sets of key competencies identified and described in this dissertation
that are needed in facilitating groups, reaching consensus, resolving conflict, and team
building.

2. Principals should develop creative ways of relieving themselves of the
management issues of the principalship in order to provide instructional leadership in
teaching and learning and to maintain a focus on the goal of improved student learning.

3. Based on this study’s finding that previous successful collaborative experiences
result in satisfaction and motivation to continue to work in collaborative ways, principals
and district administrators should include in their teacher recruitment and selection some strategies for identifying candidates who either have worked collaboratively in the past or appear to have the disposition and skills to work in collaborative ways.

4. Principals should strive to inspire a culture of teacher leadership and empowerment by acting as “hero-makers” rather than heroes (Barth, 2000, p. 448). Accordingly, this study suggests that principals as leaders of increasingly complex organizations not only require a new compendium of skills but also that they need to adopt new “mind-sets” or “ways of being” that include coping with ambiguity, empowering others, and maintaining change momentum within an enhanced accountability context.

**District Administrators**

1. Central office administrators who are committed to a collaborative ethic for schools can benefit from the implications of this study by understanding that collaboration cannot be mandated or forced on schools. Because collaboration is organic in origin and formation, district administrators may support the process in schools through the leadership behaviours identified in this study that include: modeling, communication, valuing others, and advocacy (see Chapter 6).

2. District administrators may support interdependence among principals by making professional dialogue at principal meetings and other district sponsored events a priority. The findings of this study indicate that working collaboratively with colleagues not only has the potential to enrich the professional growth of teachers but also that principal-to-principal collaboration may strengthen and enrich administrative skills and improve practice.
3. The recruitment of teachers and principals who possess or who can be expected to acquire the personal characteristics and skills necessary for collaboration should be an employment priority and direction for school districts.

Parents

1. To work collaboratively with other stakeholders in schools parents are encouraged to embrace a view that attends to all children’s good, not just the good of their own children. A vision of the greater good needs to guide parental input into choices and decisions made in the school.

2. Parents need to see their participation in the education of their children as equal to but different from that of the educators in the school.

Recommendations for Further Research

The following five recommendations are offered for further research:

1. The inclusion of students did not fit within the research design of this study. However, because student involvement in decision making is mentioned in the literature at the high school level, a focus group study at the secondary level that includes student voice could contribute further to the understanding of this topic.

2. A case study research design that uses both a purposive sampling technique to identify a school that has a collaborative culture and research questions that are similar to this study could verify whether the full set of factors associated with collaboration have been identified in this study.

3. The findings related to participants’ outcomes of collaboration warrant study from a variety of perspectives. The theoretical underpinnings that guided the questions, formation, and analysis of this study were taken from the literature related to
management, leadership, communication, and school reform. Other fields of literature, for example the various facets of psychology such as personality, adult development, or social psychology have the potential to provide valuable insight into the motivation, need, satisfaction, and synergy related to stakeholder participation in collaboration.

4. Studies designed to examine the relationship between collaborative school cultures and student learning are recommended.

5. Evidence from this study suggests that some individuals, despite the opportunity to work successfully with others and to acquire the skills of collaboration, prefer to work in isolation. A question that emerges from this study is not just how do we collaborate, but can we? It would be worthwhile to explore the deeper dynamics and factors that influence a person’s preference for individual versus group involvement in work, particularly as it relates to teaching. Such findings could shed further light on the potential of collaboration in the school reform process.

Personal Comments

In the lived experience of collaboration recounted so vividly by participants in this study, collaboration has shown its potential to transform individuals and schools. As I return to the original question in my literature review concerning the extent to which contemporary reform is collaborative in nature, I conclude that restructuring in public education relies on collaboration for the successful implementation of such initiatives as site-based management, shared decision making, school councils, and teacher professionalism. Accordingly because the purpose of this study is to come to a better understanding of collaboration, the findings of this research may fuel the reform efforts of schools.
As evidence of this study suggests, the collaboration that underpins school improvement entails going beyond the superficial structural changes of reform initiatives. Collaboration means involvement in deep and meaningful relationships based on trust and respect. It opens up leadership opportunities to more people and thus builds capacity and support for change. Throughout this study, the importance of developing relationships within the school environment has been highlighted. Indeed the process of creating new relationships is what facilitates reculturing and makes change a reality. In fact, based on the findings of this study and my personal involvement in the change process in schools, I would concur with Whitaker (1998) who concluded that it is the quality of relationships between and among stakeholders, including students, that makes a difference in school improvement.
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Appendix A

Consent for Participation in Research

This document confirms the consent of __________________ to participate in the research project titled: Toward an Understanding of Collaboration Based on Stakeholder Participation in School Improvement Initiatives. The researcher is Lorraine Slater, an Ed.D student, under the supervision of Dr. C.F. Webber, in the Graduate Division of Educational Research, at the University of Calgary. The purpose of the study is to document and analyze the perspectives of participants who have been involved in collaboration within the context of school improvement initiatives (site-based management, school councils, shared decision making, and teacher professionalism).

As a potential participant, I have been informed to an appropriate level of understanding, about the purpose and methodology of this research project, and the nature of my involvement.

I agree to participate in this project by doing the following:
* _____ participate in two focus group interviews, the first with participants who have the same role as myself, and the second in a mixed grouping.
* _____ Allow any comments made by me in the interview settings to become part of the research data (without the use of names).

I understand and agree that:
- My participation is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. The researcher has a corresponding right to terminate my participation in this research at any time. Participation or non-participation will have no effect on my position within my school, the Calgary Board of Education, or the community. I am also granted veto rights over the transcripts of the interviews that I am involved in. The transcripts of these interviews will be returned to me to allow me to check their accuracy and to decide if I would like to exercise my right of veto.
- The audio tapes, transcripts, and other data related to the research will be kept in the researcher's home in a locked cabinet for three years after the completion of the project. Following this interval of time, the data will be shredded and/or erased.
- My name and school will not be used at any time in publications or reports of the findings of this research. I will be referred to in terms of my referent group within the school (parent, teacher, principal, or assistant principal). As well, confidentiality and anonymity will be assured by the use of aliases throughout the research process and in the dissertation.
- I understand that because of the nature of the research my identity and what I say may not be concealed from other participants in the study. Accordingly, to reduce the risk to me, guidelines from The Alberta Teachers' Code of Professional Conduct, and the personal and professional integrity of all participants will be followed and maintained throughout the project.
If you have further questions regarding the study or the contents of this consent form, please contact the principal investigator:
Lorraine Slater
Ed.D Student
Graduate Division of Educational Research
The University of Calgary
Calgary, Alberta
T2N 1N4
Telephone: (403) 777-8310 (office)
(403) 278-1539 (res.)
E-Mail: lcslater@ucalgary.ca

Questions concerning matters related to this project of the contents of this consent form may also be directed to the principal investigator’s academic advisor:
Dr. C.F. Webber
Associate Dean of Graduate Studies
Faculty of Education
The University of Calgary
Calgary, Alberta
T2N 1N4
Telephone: (403) 220-5694
Fax: (403) 282-0083
E-mail: cwebber@ucalgary.ca

If you have any questions concerning your participation in this project, you may contact this office:
Chair of the Education Joint Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Education
The University of Calgary
Calgary, Alberta
T2N 1N4
Telephone: (403) 220-5626

You may also contact Pat Evans - Research Services, The University of Calgary
Telephone: (403) 220-3782
Fax: (403) 289-0693

I have read the consent form and I understand the nature of my involvement in this research project. I agree to participate within the above parameters.

Name:_________________________ Signature:_________________________
Date:_________________________ Researcher:_________________________

Please sign this copy and return it to the researcher. A duplicate copy will be returned to you for your records. Thank you for your willingness to participate in this project. Your involvement will enable you to become more informed about the beliefs and perspectives of other educational stakeholders concerning collaboration, as well as becoming more aware of your personal beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours, your input will become part of an increased understanding of the process and potential of collaboration in school improvement initiatives.
Appendix B

Question Guide for the Focus Group Interviews

Specific Research Question 1
What is the nature of collaboration?

Subsidiary Questions
(a) How has the collaborative relationship developed?
(b) How do stakeholders collaborate?
(c) What is the content of collaboration?

Focus group questions for the first interview
1. Think back to a personal experience with collaboration and describe it.
2. What brought you together?
3. What nourished your collaboration?
4. Who holds the power in your collaboration?
5. How do you deal with differences in authority and status?
6. To what extent do you want to be involved in decision making in your school?
7. When is it a time not to collaborate?

Focus group questions for the second interview
1. Think back to a time when you felt “ripped off” in a collaborative situation and describe it.
2. Describe an experience in which the expectation to collaborate didn’t fit with the situation you found yourself in.
3. Describe a time you felt uncomfortable in a collaborative situation.
4. What do you think is the driving force behind collaboration in schools?
5. When is it a time not to collaborate?

Specific Research Question 2
What are the skills and attitudes necessary for collaboration?

Subsidiary Question
How have participants gained their knowledge and skills?

Focus group questions for the first interview
1. What skills are needed for collaboration and how have you acquired them?
2. How have you learned about the process?

Focus group questions for the second interview
1. What’s the best way to learn about collaboration?
2. If we had a “collaboration kit,” what might be in it?
3. To what extent do you believe that collaboration is a learned versus a natural process?
4. What is the hard work of collaboration?

Specific Research Question 3
What are the ways in which a principal influences collaboration?
Subsidiary Research Questions
(a) How has the role of the principal changed in the collaborative context?
(b) How does the principal support collaboration?

Focus group questions for the first interview
1. Does the principal have a role in fostering collaboration?
2. Is there a style of leadership that is consistent with collaboration?

Focus group questions for the second interview
1. What are the things a principal does to support collaboration?
2. How has the role of the principal changed in the collaborative context?
3. How have the roles of other stakeholders changed in the collaborative context?
4. What has helped you to better understand the role of other stakeholders?

Specific Research Question 4
What are the outcomes of collaboration?

Subsidiary Research Questions
(a) How do stakeholders describe good or successful collaboration?
(b) What is the relationship between collaboration and school improvement?

Focus group questions for the first interview
1. How would you describe good or successful collaboration?
2. What is the relationship between collaboration and school improvement?

Focus group questions for the second interview
1. Have you experienced occasions when you have set aside your own interest for the common good?
2. How does a person's ego interfere with collaboration?
3. In a collaborative relationship have you felt like you got more than you gave?
Appendix C

Introduction to the First Interview

Welcome and Purpose
I'd like to welcome everyone here today. Thank you for taking the time to join our discussion on collaboration. You are participating in a focus group interview. A focus group interview is an interview in which people come together to talk about a topic that they all have had some experience with. I have invited you all to participate because in different ways you all have been involved in collaboration, and I am interested in your views because of those experiences. The focus group interview is not a collection of simultaneous individual interviews, but rather a discussion in which the conversation flows prompted by questions by myself as the moderator of the focus group.

Topic
Today we'll be discussing your thoughts, experiences, and perspectives about collaboration. What I am interested in is your lived experience of collaboration. There are no wrong answers, but rather differing points of view based on personal experiences. Different experiences correspond to different perspectives on the topic. Therefore please feel free to share your feelings, ideas, and perspectives even if they differ from what others may have said.

Procedures
Before we begin, let me suggest some things that will make our discussion most productive.
1. Please speak up—and only one person at a time. I am taping our conversation because I don't want to miss any of your comments.
2. We'll be on a first name basis—the name cards will help you to refer to each other by name. We'll be using aliases which will ensure confidentiality and anonymity in the research. In sharing your experiences, the educators in the group will adhere to our professional code of conduct by not naming other individuals, nor will you be asked to make judgmental, negative or unprofessional remarks about individuals.
3. Please refrain from tapping or knocking on the table as the microphone is highly sensitive and will pick up those sounds.

Moderator's Role
My role as moderator is to ask questions and listen. I will guide the discussion but not participate in sharing views, engaging in discussion or in any way shaping the outcome of the interview. I want you to feel comfortable in talking with one another and if you wish to respond to what another person has said, please feel free to do so. I'll be asking you four or five key questions with several follow-up questions under each general question. So from time to time I'll be moving the discussion from one question to another so that we're able to talk about all of the key issues.

It's important to hear from all of you today because you have different experiences. Therefore, if one of you is sharing a lot, I may ask you to let others talk. If
you aren’t saying much, I may ask for your comments. We have a fairly full agenda, so I’ll apologize in advance if I have to cut off discussion at any point. I don’t want to be impolite, but I may have to interrupt and bring us back to the main topic if we get too far afield.

Let’s begin finding out more about each of you by going around the table. Tell us about your school, what you do, and how long you have been in your current position.

**Introductory Question**

Think back to a personal experience with collaboration. The experience might have been with one other person, a small group, or a large group. Describe that collaborative experience.
Appendix D

Interest in the Study Form

Research Project Title: Toward an Understanding of Collaboration Based on Stakeholder Participation in School Improvement Initiatives

Investigator: Lorraine Slater, Ed.D. Candidate

Supervisor: Dr. Charles Webber, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, University of Calgary

1. Please indicate if you would like to have more information about the project. I will telephone you in order to give you any further details that you may require about the study, and to respond to questions that you may have.

2. If you are able, please indicate the name of a teacher who might be a possible participant in the study

School: ____________________________

3. Please include the name of a parent (s) who might participate in the study

School: ____________________________

The possibility of a response would be appreciated by March 24, 2000.

Thank you for your consideration of and/or participation in this study.

Lorraine Slater
Appendix E

Introduction Letter to School Council Chairpersons

April 3, 2000

Chairperson
School Council

Dear XXXXX,

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Lorraine Slater, and I am a doctoral student in the Graduate Division of Educational Research at the University of Calgary. My research study is entitled Toward an Understanding of Collaboration Based on Stakeholder Participation in School Improvement Initiatives.

I am also the assistant principal at a large elementary school in XXX. Therefore, as a member of XXX (along with your school) I have the opportunity to invite parents, teachers, principals and assistant principals from other elementary schools in our community to participate in my research.

My study examines collaboration. The purpose is to document and analyze the perspectives of participants who have been involved in collaboration within the context of school improvement initiatives such as site-based management, school councils, shared decision making, and teacher professionalism. The parent voice is an important component for participation in this research.

Your time commitment to the study would be to participate in two focus group interviews that will be scheduled to accommodate participants’ busy lives. The research interviews will take place over the next several months. Further information is provided concerning participation in the Consent for Participation in Research forms that I have enclosed with this letter. These forms are a part of the ethics proposal for this study that has been approved by the University of Calgary. Please be assured that your involvement as Chair of your school council provides you with the experience and background needed to be a participant in this study. Your input will become part of an increased understanding of the process and potential of collaboration in school improvement.

Your participation in this study would be highly valued. If I may call you next week, you can ask me questions and get a sense of who I am and what I am about. If you have already decided that you would like to participate in the research I would be most grateful. In this case, please sign the Consent for Participation in Research forms and return them to me in the enclosed, self-addressed envelope at your earliest convenience.

Thanks for considering this.

Lorraine Slater
Appendix F

Contact Script

1. Introduction

2. Purpose of the call
   - invite participation in the study
   - seek help in identifying other participants in the study

3. Criteria for selection
   - involved in school improvement initiatives such as school councils, shared
decision making, team teaching, or preparation of the school improvement plan.

4. Confidentiality and anonymity

5. Risks and benefits for participants

6. Answer and note questions

7. Set date and time for next contact
Appendix G

Confirmation of Participation Letter

April 6, 2000

XXXX
Teacher
XXXX Elementary

Dear XXXX,

I appreciate your considering participation in this study called *Toward an Understanding of Collaboration Based on Stakeholder Participation in School Improvement Initiatives*. I hope that your involvement would enable you to become more informed about the beliefs and perspectives of other educational stakeholders concerning collaboration, as well as becoming more aware of your own personal beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Your input would become part of an increased understanding of the process and potential of collaboration in school improvement initiatives.

Should you agree to participate in the study, as part of the process of informed consent, please read the enclosed two pages entitled *Consent for Participation in Research*. Your signature indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding your participation in the research project. Please make a copy of these two pages for your records and future reference. I would appreciate it if you could forward the original copies to me in the enclosed, self-addressed envelope, at your earliest convenience.

Thank you for considering this. If you agree to participate in the study, I will be calling you soon to arrange a time for our first focus group interview.

Sincerely,

Lorraine Slater
Appendix H

Scheduling of First Interview

Fax Transmission

To: XXXXX

Fax Number: 

School: XXXXX

Subject: Scheduling of focus group interviews

Number of pages: 1

Date: April 24, 2000

I would like to set the date for the first focus group interview in which you will be involved. I'd like to complete the first set of interviews by May 19th. I thought that the most expedient way to find appropriate dates that would suit the four people in each group was to try and co-ordinate individual schedules. Therefore, please have a look at the dates in May listed below, and indicate the date(s) that you would not be available to attend by marking N. A. on the calendar. Please remember that the interviews will be scheduled from 4:30-6:00 P.M., Monday through Friday at XXXXX. I will put together everyone's schedule and come up with a day that would work for the group. I would ask that you fax this sheet and information back to me as soon as possible so that I can do the coordination, and let everyone know the selected time. I know that we all need to get our lives in order over these next two busy months! I will call you as soon as possible with the date and room location for our interview.

Thanks again for your participation! I'm looking forward to the interview.

MAY 2000

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From: Lorraine Slater
Appendix I

Letter to participants concerning validation of transcripts

Graduate Division of Educational Research
University of Calgary
Calgary
Alberta
T2N 1N4
Phone: 278-1539 (h)
777-8310 (w)
Email: lcslater@ucalgary.ca

July 28, 2000

Dear [PARTICIPANT]

I am returning the transcript of our second focus group interview. If there is anything in the transcript that you would not like me to include in the analysis, or anything, which upon reflection, misrepresents your views, please phone me. I am aware that there are some typographical errors. As well you will notice the use of this sign (???) in the text when it was impossible for the transcriber or myself to decipher what was said on the tape because of background noise, an individual speaking too softly, or two people speaking at the same time. In studying the text, I feel that the missing words, or phrases do not detract from the speaker’s meaning or intent. However if you have anything to add which might clarify meaning in the text where these gaps occur, please do not hesitate to call me.

Please phone me by August 7th if you have any concerns with the transcript. If I do not hear from you I will assume that you have no objections to including the transcript in my study.

At a later date, as I progress with my analysis of the data and the writing of my dissertation, I am hoping to send you a point-form summary of the findings of the study. At that time, I will once again be asking for your feedback on the research.

Thank you for your ongoing participation in this study.

Regards

Lorraine Slater
Appendix J
Letter to participants concerning validation of findings

April 23, 2001

Dear Participant,

Enclosed with this letter is a copy of the four chapters of my dissertation that report the information that you provided in the interviews. I am returning these chapters to you so that you may read them and advise me if there is anything that you are uncomfortable with. Although I have provided you with copies of the interview transcripts, I feel that it is best to err on the side of caution and give you another opportunity to veto any quotes or general comments that you are concerned about.

As you know you have been given an alias and also that, as far as possible, information about you and your school has been presented in a general manner to reduce the likelihood that you might be identified. This is standard practice in research of this kind.

While you are reading this please remember that even though you know who you are, other readers will not. However, while dissertations have a reputation of not being widely read, a copy of the dissertation will be provided to your school district for its library. I would also like to publish an article based on this study, but in that I will report the findings in a more general fashion.

Please read these chapters and phone me before May 4th if you have concerns. You may phone me at work at 777-8310 or home at 278-1549.

Thank you for your ongoing cooperation.

Regards
Lorraine Slater