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Teachers Who Grow As Collaborative Leaders: The Rocky Road of Support

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Abstract

The following narratives examine three teachers over a course of ten years as they first entered teaching and began to collaborate with other teachers on curriculum. Specifically, the study examines how the teachers 1) developed as collaborators and 2) perceived elements of support from both within and outside the classroom for their collaborative efforts. The article argues that the successful collaborative efforts helped deepen their sense of agency and initiative within their teaching and, to a lesser degree, stimulated reform and change within their schools. In turn and to varying degrees, the process of collaboration supported their personal renewal in their work. The article suggests that structural support for these teachers that connected to their emerging personal practical knowledge was crucial for their development as

teacher collaborators. The article concludes by suggesting how schools may be restructured to start to become sites of authentic leadership that build on the talents, meaning, voice, and knowledge of teachers.

Teachers are often viewed as sentries to change, working alone in their classroom, repeating daily routines, delivering well-worn lessons. Outside their classrooms, traditional school cultures and structures prompt these pursuits by reinforcing the present, the conservative, and the individual (Lortie, 1975; Sarason, 1982). Given these constraints, an implicit debate has emerged in the literature on school change about the anonymous teacher as an instructional leader at her or his school. One view supports the notion that teachers can develop and use capacity for initiative and change at the local level (Cuban, 1998). In this view, teachers may work critically, reflectively, and ethically (Greene, 1989) in ways that support a sense of authorship in their teaching life (Greene, 1989; Sawyer, 2001, Vinz, 1996) and change in their settings (Wasley, 1992).

Another position, however, suggests that the culture of schools often prevents teachers from following personal initiatives to work together for personal renewal and school reform (Sarason, 1982, 1990). A comparison between the work of university faculty and that of K-12 faculty helps clarify this discussion. University faculty are rewarded when they engage in inquiry that may both support new knowledge and facilitate change (a synergy between research and service). K-12 teachers, however, are rewarded by implementing curriculum that supports various state mandates, mandates which often do not align with the personal meaning that teachers find in their work.

The following study examines how three teachers (one middle school and one high school mathematics teacher and two high school English teachers) deepened their development of agency and initiative to work towards personal self-renewal and school change by collaborating with their peers. These teachers were each anonymous in the sense that they were not department chairs or members of any organized teacher groups. They also all worked in schools that may be characterized as having non-collaborative cultures.

The following questions guided this study: What did some of the teachers' collaborative structures look like over time? How did the teachers perceive contexts of support from both within and outside the classroom for their collaborative efforts? And, how did this support change at different points as these teachers' careers unfolded? The larger issue of how teachers through their own initiative can work together for personal renewal and school reform frames these questions.

Supporting Teachers Who Collaborate

A balance of conditions and elements undergird more successful approaches to teacher collaboration. These elements include school cultures, department sub-cultures, the development of meaningful content in context, and specific resources, such as time. Little is known, however, about how teachers who emerge as leaders find and structure support for their activities. In addition, little is known about how these elements may change or unfold at different points in their careers.

School Cultures

School settings with norms of collaboration greatly support teachers who collaborate (Lieberman, 1995; Little, 1982, 1993a; McLaughlin, 1993). Such norms go beyond social interaction to indicate innovation and learning "in which teachers are enthusiastic about their work and the focus is on devising strategies that enable all students to prosper" (McLaughlin, 1993, p. 94). Cultures of collaboration facilitate "a sense of mutual security and encourag[e] interpersonal and interprofessional openness" (Nias, 1989, p. 2). A number of characteristics distinguish collegial schools. Elements include teachers' frequent and concrete talk about teaching practice; frequent and honest observations of teaching; the collaborative design, research, and evaluation of teaching materials; and peer teaching and coaching of teaching practice (Little, 1982, p. 331). Key to the formation of norms of collegiality is making "development of effective instructional practices for *all students* the top priority" (McLaughlin, 1993, p. 96). Ideally, the setting supports a community of "collective responsibility—of mutual support and mutual obligation—for practice and for student outcome" (McLaughlin, 1993, p. 97).

The character of the school's collegial environment matters as it fosters mutual problem solving and planning (Hargreaves, 1996). McLaughlin (1993), states:

> teachers *within the same school or even within the same department developed different responses to similar students depending on the character of their collegial environment.* Which response a teacher chose was a product of his or her conception of task as framed and supported by a particular school or department community (p. 89).

This process involves a complex match between school and teacher goals and school support for teachers' conceptions of their meaningful practice (McLaughlin, 1993).

Department Subcultures

While these influences can take place on a school-wide level, considerable variation in levels of support and teachers' responses to students can take place on the departmental level. Leadership on a departmental level helps determine whether and how teachers collaborate (Hargreaves, 1996; McLaughlin, 1993). Indeed, subject-matter departments can create subcultures with distinct approaches to curriculum and pedagogy within the same school (Grossman & Stodolsky, 1994; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Siskin, 1994). Given the subject-matter organization of secondary schools, departments can represent an important context for teacher interaction, the "most prominent domain of potential interdependence among teachers" (Little, 1993b, p. 149). The department can be the "professional community of greatest significance to teachers' norms of practice, conceptions of task, and attitudes toward teaching and students" (Siskin, 1990, as cited in McLaughlin, 1993, p. 92). The character of the departments—its norms of collegiality—plays a key role in the way teachers construct their practice and relate to students. The clarity of vision of the department can also help focus the collective and individual curriculum response to students (Ball, 1987; Ball & Bowe, 1992). Given the central position of departments to teachers' interactions, departments represent a potential to limit forms of interdisciplinary and cross-departmental forms of interaction. Little (1993b), for example, found that limited cross-departmental collaboration existed within survival-oriented departments whose teachers worked together only to secure resources for themselves.

Meaningful Content in Context

A further support for teacher collaboration stems from how well teachers perceive that the collaborative work actually has meaning for them in their work with students. While most educators support the process of collaboration for teachers, some question whether teacher collaboration is authentic or contrived (Hargreaves and Dawe, 1990), explicitly professional or implicitly communal (Huberman, 1993), and pedagogically sound or undermining of more spontaneous, idiosyncratic, and context-specific teaching methods. Huberman (1993), for example, suggests that teaching is highly context specific and personal: "To plan collaboratively...is to reduce the degree of freedom required for the multitude of context-sensitive, continuously evolving, interactive responses that many teachers call on" (p. 19). This concern assumes that teachers cannot either explicitly articulate or gain the perspective necessary to reveal their classroom dynamic, instead often engaging in a unique form of "communion." Supported by how similar teachers' teaching philosophies and approaches are and by a lack of explicit teacher reflection, this form of collaboration might serve to reinforce existing forms of teaching without promoting self-reflection or problem-solving behavior.

Related to the view of teaching as context-specific and idiosyncratic is the issue of the actual substance of the collaboration. Huberman (1993), in referring to the teacher as artisan, suggests that teachers who collaborate take a more "tool-centered" rather than substantive approach. A study by Zahorik (1987) of 52 teachers in six schools supports this view. Seventy percent of the time he found a student focus to the teachers' collaboration: materials, discipline, activities, and individualization, reflecting, in his view, an emphasis on student behavior. Collaborating teachers were less willing to discuss topics with more of a substantive teaching focus: evaluation, methods, objectives, reinforcing, lecturing, questioning, and room organization. Reasons that might encourage teachers to refrain from exchanging information about teaching strategies include the maintenance of professional respect for the core work of peers (Bishop, 1977), the tolerance of individual preferences and styles (Little, 1990), and the avoidance of arrogance (Huberman, 1993).

Many of these criticisms underlie Lortie's (1975) statement that "cooperation could be extensive outside the classroom but teachers preferred to keep the boundaries intact when they actually worked with students" (p. 193). Given that teachers receive crucial intrinsic rewards from students, teachers may wish to safeguard their student interactions, suggesting that team-teaching between teachers may be a risky and complex act. Huberman (1993) states that it is difficult for two teachers to be responsible for the same students at the same time: "The response set of one person would collide, early on, with that of the second, whose reading of the situation and whose rapid, on-line responses would necessarily be different..." (pp. 17-18).

However, many studies have shown that teachers can benefit from exposure to new forms of practice with an instructional focus that they perceive as meaningful to their students' learning (Grossman & Stodolsky, 1994; Mclaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Siskin, 1994; Wasley, 1992). One approach that might facilitate such an instructional focus in teachers' work is their examining teaching and learning situations within classrooms—the learning of new teaching knowledge within context. A contextualized study of teaching can present teachers with curriculum in relation to students—their responses and learning. In discussing this notion of learning "content-in-context," Lieberman (1995) writes that "teachers' understanding of student learning and development must grow as a result of their continuous inquiry into classroom practice"

(p. 22). This "experiential learning with learning related to the classroom culture" (Lieberman, 1990, p. 532) presents teachers with focused instructional inquiry and growth. Related approaches include the process approach to teaching writing, whole-language learning, cooperative learning, and the Foxfire experience (Lieberman, 1990).

Resources

Resources play a key role. One seemingly crucial resource is time for collaboration (Little, 1993a; Raywid, 1993), which may be more important than facilities or even staff development. Raywid (1993) calls time the "scarcest resource," needed for teachers to observe one another's classes, assess their work, and design curriculum, as well as to develop habits of reflection about practice (Huberman & Miles, 1984; Schon, 1984). Little (1993a) states that teacher growth "calls ...for adequate ‘opportunity to learn' (and investigate, experiment, consult, or evaluate) embedded in the routine organization of teachers' work" (p. 5). A central feature of resources is their ability to build capacity for reflection feedback, and problem solving (Fullan & Miles, 1992; McLaughlin, 1993; Lieberman, 1994).

A Narrative Method

The study draws from data collected as part of a much more extensive ten-year longitudinal study of the recruitment, preparation, teaching, induction, and retention of alternate route and college prepared teachers (Natriello and Zumwalt, 1992). In the interest of space, this article presents only brief narratives of these teachers' growth as collaborators. These narratives are then subsequently used as the basis for a more analytical discussion of emergent elements of support for these teachers.

A narrative method was selected to allow for the study of continuity in the lives of the individual teachers. Both descriptive and explanatory narrative (Polkinghorne, 1988) were used. In descriptive narrative the purpose is "to produce an accurate description of the interpretive narrative accounts individuals or groups use to make sequences of events in their lives or organizations meaningful" (Polkinghorne, 1988, pp. 161-162, as cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 16). In explanatory narrative, "the interest is to account for the connection between events in a causal sense and to provide the necessary narrative accounts that supply the connections" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 16). A narrative approach was used to attempt to capture some of the richness and nuances of meaning, as well as ambiguity and dilemma, in human affairs (Carter, 1993). Narrative places an emphasis on the connections between what humans think, know, and do as well as the reciprocal relationship between the way that human thinking shapes behavior and knowing shapes thinking" (Behar-Horenstein & Morgan, 1995, p. 143).

The study relied primarily upon participants' self-reports of their work and subsequent discussion of narratives constructed from surveys and interviews. Participants were presented with four surveys and four semi-structured interviews over the first six years of the study and four additional semi-structured interviews over the following four years. The interviews were the same for both respondents with the exception of follow-up probes and prompts.

In addition to the interviews and surveys, the three teachers were given a reconstructed narrative of their history as collaborators in the classroom over their first

ten years of their teaching lives. Special care was taken to ensure that the reconstructed narrative was faithful to the teachers' situation and their perceptions of their history. The data in these narratives were drawn from existing interview, survey, and observational data. These narratives were developed by the researcher and presented to the participants initially in written form in advance of an in-depth conversation with them about their collaboration history. This process allowed participants to examine and reflect on the reconstructed narratives before discussing their history as collaborators with the researcher. The written and spoken narratives allowed the three teachers to check, challenge, and/or contribute to the narrative. Through this process, the participants interpreted the data and discussed their view of how their collaborative life had been composed.

Constructing the narratives from data as it emerged year by year allowed first for the viewing of development as it unfolded, not recalled from a distant vantage point filtered through a veil of increased experience. The subsequent discussion by the researcher and the participants of the reconstructed narratives allowed for a more analytical discussion of the events and the meaning of their history as collaborators. Thus, narrative was both "phenomena under study and method of study" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, 4).

Data analysis

The data in this study were analyzed in a multi-step process, with their reconstruction into narratives as the basis for a discussion between the researcher and the participants. Following the discussion of the narratives, the data-analysis process was repeated again with the subsequent data.

The data analysis process took the form of a series of compressions (Huberman, 1995; Merriam 1988; Yin 1989) in the search for patterns (Bernard, 1994). The data first moved from edited initial interview, to secondary coding table, to primary coding table. The researcher analyzed the data by hand, holding "a conversation with the data" (Merriam, 1988, p. 131), in which he jotted down general thoughts and reflections and searched for regularities and patterns to transform into categories.

The interviews were organized (or chunked") into "meaning units" and placed on the secondary coding table. Each meaning unit was a direct quotation from the interview (Huberman, 1995). Care was taken to maintain data integrity, contextualization, and narrative sequence of the responses. Data were, therefore, entered in these tables in chronological order in the smallest chunk possible, which still provided adequate contextual information. The secondary code (or codes) assigned to the meaning unit was then given to each meaning unit. These codes used key words from the initial quotation, in essence "low inference snippets" (Huberman, 1995), to keep the code as faithful to the data as possible.

The third step in the data analysis process was the assignment of the primary codes. The primary codes were developed by grouping together and then organizing into patterns and themes the secondary codes. The name of an emergent overarching theme would then become a primary theme. Following Yin's suggestion that a theoretical orientation can guide the analysis (1989), the primary coding tables were organized under research question into categories related to elements of support found either inside the classroom or outside it. Finally, the interviews were read again to identify additional and possibly stronger examples of such themes and patterns as well as to search for irregularities and contradictory cases (Huberman, 1995; Merriam, 1988).

Contribution

Few studies have systematically examined how teacher collaborators have arranged elements of support over time for their collaborative work. Furthermore, few studies have examined how school culture—either conservative or more progressive—intersect over time with independent teachers who go about establishing collaborative arrangements for themselves. However, findings from the limited number of participates are not offered as a basis for the formation of generalizations, but rather as a demonstration of plausibility (Behar-Horenstein & Morgan, 1995). As Carter states, "Generalizations of this latter form are…explanatory propositions with which we can make sense of the dilemmas and problematics of teaching. (1993, p. 10). The contribution is "intended to be the creation of a new sense of meaning and significance with respect to the research topic than it is to yield a set of knowledge claims (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 42).

Unfolding Collaboration

The following three narratives briefly describe the collaborative activity in which Marilyn, a middle-school mathematics teacher, Ellen, a high school mathematics teacher, and Susan, a high school English teacher, engaged over ten years (including their student teaching). These teachers each entered teaching at the same time but worked at separate schools and did not know each other.

Marilyn in Mathematics

In her first ten years of teaching mathematics on the middle-school level, Marilyn engaged in a range of collaborative efforts. Her introduction to collaborative work began in her first year of teaching when she herself began to initiate a loosely structured collaboration. At this time, Marilyn and three other teachers, including a science teacher, organized a ski trip for "at risk" students. Initially, her goals were to combine her interests and talents with those of her students, while reinforcing her students' learning of mathematics in a real-life context. Marilyn envisioned that on this trip her students would at least discuss making mathematical applications (e.g., speed, distance, and angle problems) as they skied downhill, developing, in the process, greater self-esteem, academic motivation, and hands-on interdisciplinary knowledge. The other, more experienced teachers, however, did not carry-through on their intentions to inject structured interdisciplinary study into the fieldtrips. Frustrated, Marilyn alone could not have her students make the intended mathematical-science applications.

Marilyn and the science teacher continued to organize and sponsor this and other similar trips for the next nine years, though dropping their more contextual learning aspects. These fieldtrips contributed to her belief that positive social interaction could promote students' positive feelings about their class and school. In addition to these field trips, starting in her first year (and running through her ninth year) Marilyn began having a series of conversations with another mathematics teacher about developing new approaches for district-mandated proficiencies and tests.

A second form of collaboration that Marilyn engaged in from her second to her sixth years was initiated and structured by her school, not her. Examples of this form of collaboration included an interdisciplinary teacher-cohort planning team and summer

curriculum committees. Marilyn found in the cohort situation, to her annoyance, the science, English, and social studies teachers banded together and did the minimum level of work they thought the administration would allow. Starting in her second year, she also engaged in summer committees that collaborated to change course proficiency lists, course outlines, departmental or district tests, and textbook adoption. Much of the work on these committees was susceptible to arbitrary last-minute administrative decisions, usually related to inadequate implementation of committee work. Marilyn thought that the cohort teams were considerably more contrived in that many of the teachers at the school had to take part in them. The administration's influence in both of these collaborations was centered more on initiation than on follow-through. This lack of follow-through played to the advantage of the cohort teams, allowing them to disregard administrative program goals. Unfortunately, the lack of follow-through was frustrating to the teachers on the textbook adoption committees, who wished that the administration would support and implement—rather than disregard, as they did—their recommendations. Still, these school-initiated situations presented Marilyn with relatively structured opportunities to learn to share and critique knowledge about teaching and learning with her peers.

Starting in her eighth year, Marilyn began a third form of collaboration. Now, both she and the school together initiated and structured a collaborative team of teachers to design a new Algebra I program to be implemented the following year. While either Marilyn or the school initiated the other two collaborations separately, Marilyn and her collaborative peers as well as the school jointly initiated and structured the Algebra I committee. The school and the teachers mutually agreed upon program goals which focused on student learning. In addition, the school gave the team greater autonomy to design the program and its follow-up evaluation based on positive impact of student learning. As Marilyn began this committee, she expressed cautious hope that the school would implement the new Algebra I Program as planned.

Marilyn thought that the collaborative process was successful in its goal of establishing an entirely new Algebra I program. Working together, the committee devised and followed a clear collaborative process. The committee began by raising explicit questions related to their knowledge of student learning, content coverage issues, course-sequence issues, and the proposed textbooks under review. They then evaluated these new textbooks by way of these questions, which were drawn from their own practice. One question, for example, was how well the books supported students' in-class use of manipulatives, such as triangles and scales and supplemental problems. The committee then designed a two-year curriculum for the new algebra program.

Marilyn thought that the committee's success in finding consensus was related to its member's camaraderie, as well as similar teaching backgrounds and general educational philosophies, within a context of mutual respect. At the end of her tenth year, Marilyn was waiting with some guarded skepticism to see if the school would follow through and implement the committee's recommendations.

Ellen in Mathematics

Teaching mathematics on the high school level, Ellen engaged in a series of collaborative arrangements in her first ten years in teaching. All of these collaborations were relatively conflict free. Interestingly, they also followed a pattern that was seemingly consistent with how she evolved as a teacher. In the classroom, she went from being relatively prescriptive in her first couple of years, to more open and experimental in years three though five, to more hands-on and experiential after her fifth year.

Ellen began her first collaboration in her first two years of teaching, in which she team-taught a basic math class with a veteran teacher. Initiated and supported by the school as an induction program for new teachers, this classroom-based collaboration benefited Ellen in a number of ways. Ellen and the other teacher had daily classroom interaction, daily shared planning and discussion time, and a complimentary sharing of experience.

From her third through sixth years in teaching, Ellen's collaborative work changed. After teaching algebra for two years, she saw a need to change the sequence of mathematics courses, to place a beginning geometry course between the first two algebra courses. This collaboration was marked by a sense of mutuality of interest between Ellen and the school, initiated by both the school and Ellen, organized around specific task goals, and, for Ellen at least, relatively focused on classroom-based knowledge of student learning. Unlike the type of collaborative work beginning in her sixth year, the committee outcomes were relatively consistent with Ellen's then current approaches to teaching. This collaboration never encouraged her explicitly to examine or challenge her assumptions to teaching and learning. The following year, the school implemented the sequence of mathematics courses in agreement with her recommendations.

In her sixth year of teaching, Ellen began to realize that the district-set midterm exam in geometry was focused on students' basic recall knowledge and basic skills. She knew that the test had to be changed, but wasn't sure how. Getting district permission, she and a mathematics teacher from the same district but a different school, began to plan a new assessment program which facilitated students' performance-based learning.

This collaborative work was similar to that of the previous ones in that it was focused on established course curriculum and allowed Ellen to work with people she knew and liked. It differed from previous efforts in that Ellen showed much greater initiative and experimentation. Also, the process of the collaboration encouraged her to challenged and change many of her teaching practices, if not teaching beliefs. There was now more clear oversight of the process, more conscious experimentation, more recognition of the student-context to the assessment format, and more reflection routinized into the collaborative process.

She and her partner approached their collaborative goals by first clearly establishing a rationale related both to district goals and student-learning considerations. In working together, they focused on changing approaches to mathematical format, rather than content. The projects they devised for students built on student creativity and critical thinking skills related to problem-solving processes more than products. Ellen and her partner consciously built oversight and reflection into their collaborative process, viewing the first year of the new program as a pilot program. In devising their new midterm collaboration, Ellen and her partner developed a systematic approach to evaluate each other's knowledge of teaching and learning, including the use of classroom artifacts and an explicit discussion of how students in their classes learn. Sharing a sense of creativity with her partner, she and the other teacher began to examine ways of teaching that were very different from how they had both taught in the past.

While a stated district goal of the collaboration was the implementation of the new math assessment program, Ellen downplayed the importance of greater school or district implementation to her feelings of satisfaction with the collaboration outcomes. This collaboration ended positively with the school implementing and establishing their new assessment program as an optional midterm exam. Ellen and her partner made plans to review the midterm program in its second year.

Susan in English

Susan took part in a number of collaborations with her peers. While these collaborations initially were somewhat distant from her classroom (e.g., a school accreditation evaluation), they eventually came to reflect her interests and influence her curriculum.

In her first two years of teaching, Susan engaged in three school-initiated collaborations, activities which every teacher was required to join. In one effort, she took part in a Middle States School Evaluation. Susan later dismissed this work as obligatory and meaningless. A second effort was a cooperative teaching situation in which she worked with a writing-lab teacher at her school. She thought the lab presented her and her students with an opportunity to change their approaches to the writing process, promoting a process of more substantive revision to increase the depth of content within their compositions. And in the third early collaboration, Susan attended a hands-on workshop on "advanced teaching strategies." After attending this workshop, she began to design her lessons in relation to the four student learning styles discussed at the workshop.

In her third year, Susan took a one-year sabbatical in order to earn a Master of Arts in Teaching degree at a prestigious Ivy League university. Back at her school, she wished to implement her master's thesis, an effort which led to her establishing an English/history interdisciplinary humanities program with a history teacher. Susan initiated this beginning period of collaboration, unlike the earlier one that was established by the school. Conceived of as a pilot program, it may also be distinguished from the following one by its emphasis on reflection and change.

Before actually beginning to work together, they discussed how they would do this and what their collaborative goals were. They decided that they would actually team-teach in a blocked class, twice as long as a regular class. They also established a daily shared preparation time, which let them monitor the class, anticipate directions and needs, develop foresight, and reflect on the process. While buoyed by a number of successes in this class, their reflection focused on perceived issues in the class. After the first year, they thought that this approach was too focused on the lockstep chronology of history, with the social studies curriculum dominating the English curriculum. This reflection led them to add a year-in-review project in the second year to make the course less doctrinaire and routine. In this project, each student adopted a year as the focal point for a detailed project. This project then formed much of the curriculum as the students presented it to the rest of the class.

Susan then took another sabbatical to study writing. When she returned to her school, she continued to teach and develop the interdisciplinary humanities course. During this year, Susan and the history teacher continued to teach and meet together as in the initial two-years of the program. They discussed their curriculum in relation to a framework which considered teaching-and-learning aspects of their course: a desired balance between presenting students with a defined course structure and promoting their independence, imagination and creativity; and the use of student work to promote student creativity and curriculum ownership.

This time period in her humanities collaboration was marked by a number of characteristics. First, she and the history teacher established a reflective process which was focused at times on relatively nuanced classroom specifics and at times on the way that school structures could either support or hinder the humanity course's sustainability. For example, they wondered how to promote the institutionalization of their program within the school as well as how their program could change the culture of their school. Also at this time, a conflict arose between Susan and her partner's efforts to institutionalize the program and the growing hostility of the school to it, creating in

Susan's words, a "systemic nightmare" to it. The intersection of these situations led them to a decision to terminate the program. Ironically, this experience prompted her to realize that to become the teacher that she wished to become, she would have to find a new school in a new system. As Susan stated in her last year of teaching, "You need an entirely new system…Ironically, I couldn't stay in that system. And I can't go back to that system."

Teachers' Elements of Support for Collaboration

The particulars of these three teachers' collaboration with their peers differ. Similar patterns, however, appear in their perceptions of support for their collaborative work.

Personal Characteristics

Personal characteristics played an important role in how these teachers emerged as collaborators. Each of these teachers shared an overriding concern for the learning of all of their students. Each teacher brought about collaborative situations that reflected personal questions about teaching and learning. Each teacher was willing to expose her own work to public scrutiny, and each believed (to different degrees) in experiential learning. Each teacher thought that being able to select her collaborative partners was crucial. By their sixth year in teaching, each teacher had developed peer selection criteria involving complementary (e.g., educational philosophy and views of student learning) yet contrasting (e.g., different approaches to practice) elements. And, each teacher thought that a shared philosophy of teaching and learning was more important to her collaboration than a shared approach to teaching.

Structured Approaches to Critiques of Practice

Perhaps the strongest level of support that these teachers found to motivate their collaborative work was their awareness that this work was directly helping them to improve their classroom instruction for all their students. Reluctant to talk about the concept of "teaching practice," each of these three teachers preferred instead to discuss more specific issues and questions of teaching and learning. A network of relationships existed between their evolving views of practice and their participation in these collaborations. A scaffolding process appeared to be at play in which at different points in their careers there was an appropriate balance between support of existing curriculum knowledge with positive tension from critiques of practice. Related to how their view of support changed over time, these critiques focused in the first year or two on preexisting examples of curriculum which they did not develop. However, by the third or fourth year, they focused more on personal examples of curriculum. This balance may be seen in their evolving process of reflection in these collaborative efforts. This process of reflection was structured to allow them to critique and question forms of practice in ways that became increasingly more centered on or more systematically critical of their evolving practice. This process is found in the collaborative work of all three cases when examined over the course of their teaching careers as a whole.

Initially, each teacher began to critique and reflect on curriculum—but in ways that did not directly expose or threaten her own curriculum. They often discussed preexisting curriculum, for example changing a course sequence, redesigning district

tests, or revising existing assignments (e.g., the research paper). A possible exception to this pattern may be found in Susan's work with her establishment of the humanities program. But initially, this curriculum often had a relatively prescriptive, subject matter emphasis. At this point, they critiqued less their own practice or views, than curriculum that was relatively consistent or similar to it, allowing them to guard their still fledgling curriculum making from public inspection while possibly examining it by proxy.

As each of these teachers gained classroom knowledge and expertise, however, much of their reflection on practice consistently revolved around questions and dilemmas related to curriculum that supported their students as active learners. By their sixth or seventh year, all three teachers directly critiqued their own practice in their collaborative work, framed by questions that they drew from their work. Eventually, each teacher intentionally established collaborative frameworks within which to weigh and evaluate multiple approaches to curriculum. On a relatively large scale, for example, Susan, Marilyn, and Ellen actually established pilot programs to supply feedback for subsequent evaluation and revision of their programs, again focused on their impact on student learning. These processes then allowed the collaborators to share and generate knowledge about the same leaning context or environment. And, within this emergent context of shared-and-generated knowledge, each of these teachers and their partners developed subject content with pronounced process elements.

Evolving Notion of Subject Matter

Initially these teachers were each relatively traditional in their teaching. Over time, however, each teacher's notions of their subject matter and disciplines changed. Eventually Ellen, whose later collaborative work was confined to geometry, thought that the flexibility and relatively open-ended nature of the content of and approaches to geometry supported her work with the other teacher. Marilyn thought that the relatively fixed nature of the content and sequence of mathematics coupled with notions of multiple approaches gave her shared ground to discuss algebra with other teachers. Susan found that English easily lent itself to an interdisciplinary pairing with social studies. She did not collaborate on curriculum related to honors English, though, where she may have had a more fixed notion of coverage. They all found that criteria for standardizing testing that was becoming more open-ended supported their collaborations related to curriculum.

As they developed as collaborators, their approaches to teaching were also changing. Over time, they each began to show a tolerance for the ambiguity or the multi-layeredness of curriculum, both within themselves and between themselves and collaborative partners. In all three cases, a growth in pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987) coincided with their synthesizing from their collaboration into their curricular planing views of curriculum that they may at one time have rejected.

School Support

Each of these teachers stressed that support from the administration, department, and school was essential to her collaboration. Ellen's creative-midterm math program, arguably the most sustainable collaboration of these teachers, enjoyed the full support of her department, school, and the district (if not peers). Susan's remarkable interdisciplinary program, on the other hand, while a powerful experience for its students, suffered immensely from a hostile administration. These teachers' views of

structural supports also evolved over the course of their collaborative work with their peers. Through their third to fifth year of teaching, they appreciated a greater emphasis on the direct contribution of the administration in structuring situations to support their sharing of knowledge and growth of curriculum. By about their sixth year of teaching, they each began to appreciate support from their administrators for their deeper and more personal involvement in their collaborative projects themselves, rather than that for more decontextualized innovations in teaching, innovations found, for example, in in-service workshops. A further form of administrative support was a shared sense of purpose or mission, in which the goals of the collaboration were consistent with those of the school and of specific individuals, such as the principal and curriculum supervisors.

These teachers also found that the collaborative process itself was supportive to their involvement in collaboration. While no school had a coherent program toward collaboration, certain approaches to collaboration may have fostered greater teacher involvement in this type of work. Ellen, for example, valued her sequence of collaborations, going from more-to-less administratively supplied structure, undergirded by general school support. These teachers increasingly found meaning in collaborative work that allowed them to create cycles of growth for themselves. These cycles linked personal questions about teaching and learning to peer discussion, experimentation, reflection, and the generation of new questions about teaching and learning.

The Evolving Nature of Support

As these teachers grew in experience and level of reflection, the form and amount of support that they viewed as important to their collaboration changed. Initially, they each valued collaborative support that was more one-on-one and classroom specific. In addition to meeting their initial needs as new teachers, this form of support facilitated their growth in knowledge and experience in the actual process of collaboration. By about their sixth year in teaching, however, all three of the teachers began to seek and value support for their collaborative work that was broader and encompassed the school as a complex but changeable organization. This latter form of support was more systemic and compatible with their growth in knowledge about the relationship between meaningful instruction and school culture and structures.

Discussion: Islands of Agency and Initiative

The unfolding narratives of Marilyn, Ellen, and Susan show the unique ways that they developed and acted on personal meaning in their work. Their actions at work became increasingly grounded in their developing knowledge, questions, and theories about teaching and learning. This grounded knowledge informed and was informed by the various ways that they constructed curriculum contexts to help students learn. They not only persevered in their efforts to work with their peers. They also helped to establish greater contexts of support in order to collaborate with their peers. In addition, these three teachers encountered and challenged — often with considerable personal effort — individualism, conservatism, and presentism (Lortie, 1975) inherent in school structures.

Marilyn, Ellen, and Susan's narratives suggest that collaborative goals and activities intersected with their school's culture and structure and that this intersection became more meaningful for them as they developed greater knowledge and experience from their teaching. As these teachers' personal practical knowledge of teaching

(Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) developed, the relationship between their schools' structures of support and their growing personal practical knowledge became increasingly important to these teachers.

Given this backdrop, a question emerges from their narratives: Did these teachers develop a sense of initiative and agency for personal self-renewal and school change? These questions are complicated. First, each of these teachers, at least for a time, did develop a growing sense of initiative and agency in her work, both within the classroom and within her collaborations. However, the degree of self-renewal and satisfaction related to the achieved or intended outcomes of this agency was related to their perceived level of success in reaching their goals. Ellen, for example, was arguably the most successful in her collaborative work through her tenth year of teaching. Collaborating with the teacher from the neighboring school to change the midterm exam in geometry, she changed both district guidelines impacting her work as well as the curriculum she made in class. In a way, she established an island of agency for herself, basically centered on her classroom. Whether on not other teachers in her school also changed their midterm exams in response to the new guidelines did not directly affect her curriculum changes, which she could still carry out. This revision to her curriculum led to an invigorating sense of self-renewal for her in her teaching.

Susan, on the other hand, was much more ambitious in her collaborative goals. She initially developed a context to support her interdisciplinary course and then established a new program at her school. However, the relationship between her program and greater school change became increasingly problematic for her. For a time, her increased agency and initiative also led to a profound sense of self-renewal. Ironically, it also contributed greatly to her leaving the classroom to work for the charter school movement to empower teachers to start their own schools.

This difference in the career pathways between Ellen and Susan echoes findings of Martin Huberman. In his well-known study about the professional life cycle of teachers, Huberman (1989) suggests that the teachers in his study experienced multiple career paths at different stages in their teaching lives. At the end of a long teaching career, some of the teachers in his study were relatively satisfied and content with their teaching careers, whereas others experienced a sense of frustration and a lack of closure: "Depending on the previous trajectory, this final phase can be either serene or acrimonious" (Huberman, 1989, p.38). This outcome was partly related to the teachers' perception of how successful they had been in achieving their goals in teaching. Those teachers who attempted to bring about relatively large-scale change were often the most dissatisfied when retiring from teaching.

Restructuring Schools As Sites of Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership (Evans, 1993) values "the head, the heart, and the hand" (Sergiovanni, 1992) of leadership and builds from the multiple voices and unique strengths found at a given site (Miller and O'Shea, 1992). It recognizes that teachers develop and change over the course of their careers. This form of leadership is necessary for schools to become places of self-regulated learning, not only for students, but also for teachers and other staff members—at different points along a teaching continuum from novice to more experienced teacher. While teachers who emerge as collaborators and leaders may arrange structures of support for themselves in culturally impoverished schools, these teachers often pay an emotional and professional price. Instead of supporting emergent leadership characteristics in teachers, many schools expose teachers to conditions that facilitate contrived and superficial forms of collaboration (Hargreaves

& Dawe, 1990).

There are many ways for schools to value and build from the unique voices and strengths of teachers like Marilyn, Ellen, and Susan. The following elements might be included in such a consideration. It is helpful to recognize that teachers' agency, voice, and sense of meaning matter greatly to them as they work with each other and their students. Efforts to control the quality of teaching through rigid, centrally mandated accountability measures can create sites of contention for teachers.

In addition to personal efficacy, the teachers in this study were supported in meaningful collaboration by a dynamic notion of curriculum. They each realized that for curriculum to engage their students, the students must engage the curriculum. Thus they began to view curriculum as a dynamic gestalt of student input, teacher input, classroom materials, and inside-as-well-as-outside classroom contexts (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Sawyer, 1998; Schwab, 1978). This more open notion of content calls into question authoritarian views of what knowledge is of most worth in the classroom. Given that curriculum is a dynamic interaction, teacher support for collaboration that involves curriculum will change for each individual teacher at different points along his or her career. Furthermore, successful collaboration is itself a support for further collaboration as it deepens and extends knowledge and expertise about teaching. Schools run the risk of losing good teachers by devaluing and dismissing their meaningful collaborative efforts.

Over time and with a growth in teaching experience and knowledge, these teachers began to value structural support that facilitated their efforts to bring about not only classroom, but also program and school change. At least for a time, each of them carved out sites of personal growth and renewal, sites which included unique support structures. Ellen found professional renewal in change efforts that were primarily focused on her classroom. On the other hand, Susan's questions about student learning led her to establish an interdisciplinary program that bridged classroom walls. The degree to which the three schools helped or hindered these two teachers, as well as Marilyn, in their quest for the improvement of education for all students greatly influenced these teachers' decisions to remain or leave the teaching profession. The grounded knowledge that teachers generate and share within collaborative islands ought to support the predictable success of school reform.

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