HOW TEACHERS EXPERIENCE A COLLEGIAL COLLABORATIVE

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Abstract

Collaboration has been found to be a powerful tool for professional development and central for further opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practice. However, school districts continue to have difficulty both implementing and sustaining collaboration. The purpose of this research was to investigate the experience of the teacher in a creative, instructional collaboration.

This study provided several observations. The first was that teachers can experience successful, high-level collaboration in which they perceive a sense of satisfaction, mutuality, trust and growth. For the five middle school teachers in this Jewish school of faith, their satisfactory experience with collaboration was teacher-initiated. When the participating teachers felt that they had power over their collaboration, they perceived the collaborative experience to be productive, in that they were able to engage in collegial learning (Darling-Hammond, 2000; John-Steiner, 2000). The teachers in this study found that teacher-initiated collaboration offered them trust and they were more comfortable, transparent, and open with their partners. They were also more willing to question their existing approaches and try new ones (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). The results also supported the claim that teacher collaboration can facilitate school reform. Participating teachers felt less isolation and developed more teacher knowledge. It found that more scholarly dialogue and study of the phenomenon of teacher collaboration, as a means of promoting teacher learning and building achievement, is necessary to the betterment of education.

Key Words: collaboration, teacher-initiated, IPA, professional learning community, professional development, Collaboration Theory.
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# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. 3  
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................................. 4  
Chapter I: Statement of the Problem ..................................................................................................... 8  
Significance of the Research Problem .................................................................................................. 10  
Research Central Questions ................................................................................................................. 12  
Theoretical Framework ......................................................................................................................... 13  
Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................... 18  
Chapter II: Literature Review ............................................................................................................... 19  
Preparation for Classroom Teachers .................................................................................................... 19  
Professional Development for Classroom Teachers .............................................................................. 23  
Cooperation versus Collaboration ........................................................................................................ 29  
Importance of the Jewish Day School .................................................................................................. 34  
Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................... 35  
Chapter III: Research Design ............................................................................................................... 37  
Methodology ......................................................................................................................................... 37  
Participants ........................................................................................................................................... 41  
Data Collection ..................................................................................................................................... 42  
Procedures ........................................................................................................................................... 43  
Data Analysis ....................................................................................................................................... 44  
Validity and Credibility ......................................................................................................................... 48  
Limitations ........................................................................................................................................... 50
Conclusion ..................................................................................................................................... 52

Chapter IV: Research Findings...................................................................................................... 53
Participants ..................................................................................................................................... 54
Jewish Day School Experience....................................................................................................... 55
Significance of the Unit of Study................................................................................................... 57

Participant Profiles ......................................................................................................................... 58
  Allen ............................................................................................................................................ 58
  Beatrice ....................................................................................................................................... 61
  Charles ....................................................................................................................................... 64
  Delilah ......................................................................................................................................... 66
  Erica ........................................................................................................................................... 70

Experience of Collaboration as a Culture...................................................................................... 72
Experience of Collaboration in Promoting Professional Growth .................................................. 84
Belief That Collaboration Provides Personal Growth .................................................................... 97
Summary ....................................................................................................................................... 102

Chapter V: Discussion of Research Findings ............................................................................... 104
Major Themes Related to Literature ............................................................................................. 106
  Collaboration as Professional Growth ......................................................................................... 110
  Collaboration as Personal Growth ............................................................................................... 112
  Collaboration as the Jewish Day School ..................................................................................... 117
Results Related to Theoretical Framework .................................................................................. 119
Implications for Future Research ................................................................................................. 122
Meaning of Collaborative Culture ................................................................................................. 125
Implications for Professional Practice .......................................................................................... 125
Chapter One

Statement of the Problem

Collaboration is teachers working and learning together to achieve common goals. The assumption is that teachers will change their practices in significant ways when they work together to achieve a common vision; that working and planning together is, by itself, a powerful professional development tool (Pugach & Johnson, 2002). DuFour (2005) defines powerful collaboration as a “systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice” (pg. 36). Dufour, Dufour, Eaker and Many (2008) state that a professional learning community is “educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. Professional learning communities operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students in continual, job-embedded learning for educators” (pg. 14). Collaboration has the potential to strengthen the school as a whole through enhanced student achievement (DuFour, 2005). It also builds morale through the development of shared norms of core practices, reflective dialogue, socialization structures and de-privatization practices, which in turn helps build a professional learning community (Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1995).

Collaborative practices have been defined as central to professional development because they further opportunities for teachers to establish networks of relationships through which they may reflectively share their practice, revisit beliefs on teaching and learning and co-construct knowledge (Achinstein, 2002; Chang & Pang, 2006). There is also research to support that collaborative group learning is the most powerful form of professional development (Arter, 2001; Garmston & Wellman, 1999; Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Zeichner & Somekh, 2000) and that
collaborative learning is highly effective in meeting the needs of every child in the classroom (Bollough & Gitlin, 2001; Cisar, 2008; Knight, Wiseman, & Cooner, 2000). Arter (2001) states that the opportunity to collaborate has been cited as the most important factor in promoting collegiality and suggests that collaborative problem solving is the most effective form of professional development.

There are many models of collaborative arrangements in educational literature and their assumed power for creating change. They are viewed as essential to teacher learning and ultimately, to student learning (Louis, Kruse, & Marks, 1996; Rogers & Babinski, 2002). All of the models assume that teachers can learn when given the opportunity to work together (Brownell, Adams, Sinedar, Waldron, & Vanhover, 2006; Pugach & Johnson, 2002; Trent, 1998). These research findings about the importance of collaboration in changing teacher practice have led to its widespread acceptance as an essential component of any effort aimed at improving teacher learning.

Collaboration is considered to be a central element of major school reform efforts (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Johnson & Kerper, 1996; Pugach & Johnson, 2002). However, only 56% of districts in the United States report training teachers in collaborative learning (Kohn, 2002) and it has been estimated that only 5%-10% of participants involved in collaborative learning continue the use the collaborative over time (Kohn 2002, pg. 6). Given the focus in school reform efforts on teacher collaboration it is worthwhile to examine the collaborative experience from the teacher’s perspective in order to gain insight into the experience that individual teachers construct from a creative instructional collaborative experience.
Significance of the Research Problem

Collaboration represents a marked shift in educational practice. Robbins & Alvy (2003) point out that the isolationist mentality of many schools and districts could (and in places still can be) seen in the “Teacher of the Year” or “Staff Member of the Month” awards that highlight the individualism and isolationism of the profession. Also, teachers are also often misinformed about what constitutes a collaborative (Sternberg, 2003). Some think that a teacher can only help a child in their area of expertise; or that a special education teacher can only help a special education student (Lassonde & Israel, 2010). Teachers also think that the workload will be cut in half (or doubled) or that only one teacher is responsible for writing the lesson plan. Still others think that this is just another trend that will soon be gone (Lassonde & Israel, 2010). In taking away their autonomy, there is concern that there will be a mindset of a ‘group-grade’ for the teachers and an inability to properly assess the students (Robbins & Alvy, 2003).

Sternberg (2003) has noted reluctance in teachers to engage in collaborative efforts. Because collaboration involves trial and error approaches, teachers are uncomfortable as they like ‘tried and true’ strategies to learning (Robbins & Alvy, 2003).

Collaboration is difficult because it is inquiry-based learning in nature and it is meant to shift the focus of the learning to the student, which is not how most teachers have been trained (Sternberg, 2003). Typically, teachers are trained by way of obtaining a traditional certificate (TC) by attending an accredited university. They receive varying amounts of instruction, ranging from 240 to 1,380 hours (Constantine, Player, Silva, & Halgren, 2009). On average, they complete a total of 642 hours of instruction in their subject area (Constantine et al., 2009). Teachers who receive alternate route certification (AC) receive more than double that amount (Constantine et al., 2009). Both certifications are designed to make teachers highly qualified "to ensure that teachers
have the necessary subject matter knowledge and teaching skills in the academic subjects that the teachers teach" (Constantine et al., 2009). Both certifications are designed to provide a classroom which is lecture-based in format, not student-centered.

Collaboration is necessary to the future success of our schools and our students. DuFour & Eaker (1998), Elmore (2000) and Hawley & Villi (1999) state that collaboration cannot be an “educational fad”, nor can it be “shallow, fragmented or unfocused” (Elmore, 2000, p. 440). It must be based on “solid research” which is data-driven and student-focused (Elmore, 2000 p. 440). Dufour (2005) also recognized that “people use the term collaboration to describe every imaginable combination of individuals with an interest in education. In fact, the term has been used so ubiquitously that it is in danger of losing all meaning” (pg. 4).

Thus far, the only research done on collaboration has proven that it is a powerful form of professional development serving to improve student learning (Arter, 2001; Garmston & Wellman, 1999; Zeichner & Somekh, 2009). Schools are incorporating collaboration into their professional learning communities by means of mentorship (the coaching relationship between a novice and a more experienced teacher) and “push-in” teachers (additional teachers who join the classroom teacher in order to support students with educational needs) and although this can be helpful, it has not been found to be the most meaningful use of collaboration and it has not been shown in helping sustain the collaboration over time (Arter, 2001).

In summary, current studies in collaboration focus on the impact of collaboration on the student. Although there is much research on teacher collaboration and the impact of collaborative learning on student learning, there is little current research on how it benefits the teachers as individuals. In addition, nearly half of our schools do not provide professional development training in collaborative practices and most do not continue using the practice (Arter, 2000).
Further research on how individual teachers experience a creative instructional collaborative activity was required. This research could help principals, curriculum coordinators and educational policy makers further their expertise in providing effective training in collaboration.

Research Central Questions and Goals

The purpose of this research was to investigate the value teachers in a faith-based school constructed from a creative, instructional collaboration and whether this impacted their personal sense of value and the value of and connection to the school community. Therefore, the following question was proposed:

What is the experience of the teacher in a creative instructional collaborative in the context of a faith-based school?

The intent of this study was to document the experiences of a particular group of educators constructing a curriculum collaboratively for an 8th grade to determine the meaning they constructed from the planned collaborative experience as it related to professional growth.

Positionality Statement

The research was a process of constructing a creative instructional collaborative. The author was a participant. By working as a collaborative group conducting inquiry in our development and implementation of a professional development model for collaborative learning, I was able to experience the processes and it allowed for a deeper, richer understanding of the value teachers constructed from a creative, instructional collaborative experience.
This study was done in a private Jewish day school in the northeastern United States. It was done with five, middle school, secular teachers in the design and implementation of a unit of study on the Holocaust.

The researcher maintained a reflexive attitude in order to avoid bias in the study. Reflexivity refers to critically and candidly thinking about the research experience and process with sensitivity (John-Steiner, 2008). Reflexivity acknowledges that meanings acquired from the analysis of transcripts are influenced by interpretation. In order to gain a better understanding of the participants’ world, this can only be done through the researcher’s intimate engagement with the participants’ transcripts. The research consistently focused on the real life world of the participant through sincere and honest descriptions using the reflexive process throughout. Reflexivity is an explicit evaluation of the self. From its etymological roots, we know that ‘re-flexivity’ involves looking again, turning your gaze to the self; in effect, reflexivity involves reflecting your thinking back to yourself. It evokes an interpretivist ontology which construes people and the world as interrelated and engaged in a dialogic relationship that constructs multiple versions of reality. A reflexive study will therefore assume the co-construction of meaning within a socially oriented research scenario. Taking a reflexive attitude enabled a holistic approach to the research which was imperative for it to address the implications of the researcher and researched being of the same order. Thus, reflexivity was embedded throughout this study.

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this research was to investigate the value teachers assign to a creative instructional collaborative experience. In order to better understand the teacher experience in a creative instructional collaborative the theoretical framework used was Vera John-Steiner’s Collaboration theory.
Vera John-Steiner (2000) set the stage for research in collaboration by investigating the creative collaborations of a variety of people in art, science, mathematics, medicine and others. She ascertained that scholars must view learning and thinking as a social process; must become a “thought community” (pg. 4). She stated that, “A crucial advantage of collaboration is the strength it provides to overcome one’s socialization into a discipline and a thought community. Knowledge is constructed among a community of persons mutually exchanging ideas and maintaining intellectual interaction” (pg. 119). Collaboration, as defined by Vera John-Steiner (2000) is “the interdependence of thinkers in the co-construction of knowledge” (pg. 3). It is a ‘thought community’, a partnership, a sense of “we-ness” (pg. 204). She further stated, “the mutuality that is experienced in the exchange of ideas and the enjoyment of each other’s company bolsters the partnership” (pg. 131) …and that “the partners may develop previously unknown aspects of themselves through motivated joint participation” (pg. 187). Collaboration, “bears the complexity of human connectedness, strengthened by joint purpose and strained by conflicting feelings” (pg. 91). Collaborative learning is at the core of professional learning communities and involves co-construction of meaning and mutual relationships through the shared enterprise of collaboration (John-Steiner, 2000).

John-Steiner found that an individual’s personality is a system rather than a collection of traits. By watching others with whom they work and live, they challenge themselves to try to keep up with that person and absorb the other’s belief in their capabilities. Those who participate in collaborative relationships develop different emotional resources than those working in isolation. This relationship of diversity and growth is defined by John-Steiner as complementarity and collaboration benefits from complementarity in skills, experience, and perspectives and creates a
passionate interest in the subject matter. This passion is a critical component to sustaining the collaborative.

John-Steiner noted that collaboration takes time and involves “mutual care-taking” (pg. 128). It is the construction of a new mode of thought that involves “stretching the self” (pg. 44). Collaboration thrives on diversity of perspectives and on constructive dialogues between individual’s negotiating their differences while creating their shared values and vision. It involves flights and resting places of thought. Flights are moments of consciousness that change from one moment to another and resting places correspond to sustained continuity of awareness of oneself and others involved in the collaboration. Collaboration requires individuals to relinquish aspects of their autonomy but this results in the broadening of the participant’s talents and modes of thoughts and contributes to their individual growth. This then contributes to the growth of the group as a whole. Collaboration has no guaranteed set of values as the values of the group continue to shift as they grow both individually and as a group. Sometimes opposition and dynamic tension are unavoidable but they yield new understanding and knowledge because when individuals join together and build upon their complementarity, they expand their reach. The thinking and creativity involved in collaboration is individual but this leads to a broadening of the individual person and gives them a better sense of self, which promotes social thinking. It is a “new philosophy (that) requires not only a powerful sense of self but also an ability to step back and view one’s notions from the perspective of the critic and to know where one develops new ground and where one is borrowing or imitating” (pg. 43). Collaborative partners build on their solidarity as well as their differences. Complementarity in knowledge, work habits and temperament adds to the motivation needed for effective partnerships. It stimulates and challenges the individual whose efforts are expanded. It is a source of enrichment and provides the mechanism to expand personal abilities.
with the tools of a discipline not their own. It involves “real talk” (pg. 130) and criticism is a central feature of good collaboration. It is a long process and it involves compromise but the common vision and devotion to shared tasks results in “mutual care-taking” (pg. 43) which is a fundamental aspect of learning. It involves “knowing things and learning to know” (pg. 130) and leads to the development of an understanding of the world and themselves; of a deepened mutuality and trust. “Sustained, mutually beneficial collaboration provides a mirror to an individual’s broadening his or her self-knowledge, which is crucial to creativity” (pg. 48).

In Shared Minds (1990), Michael Schrage states, “People should understand that real value in the sciences, the arts, commerce, and indeed, one’s personal and professional lives, comes largely from the process of collaboration” (pgs. 32-33) but collaboration goes beyond communication and requires that, “People spend as much time understanding what they are doing as actually doing it” (John-Steiner, 2000, pg. 195). It is a ‘thought community’—meaning that ideas are so freely shared and mutually exchanged and transformed; passing from person to person and thought to thought that it no longer belongs to an individual but to the collective. It is not a cooperating team whereby each member is assigned a task or responsibility. Instead, it is the mutual construction of a shared vision and a group that interacts collaboratively to achieve outcomes that are jointly negotiated and re-negotiated as the collaborative develops. Collaboration requires “trust, the freedom to explore and criticize as equals and a fluid division of labor” (John-Steiner, 2000, pg. 177).

The shared goals must provide the motivation to navigate through the tensions, the differences, the workloads or any conflicts. It allows for the development of new philosophies and prompts emotional growth, based on Vygotsky’s (1978) zone of proximal development. He proposed that in interactions with others who offer more experience, individuals can go beyond
their current level of development. It is about adults, “expanding their affective resources by appropriating the consequences of a shared experience” (John-Steiner, 2000, pg.128). It involves, as Janet Surrey (1991) states, the “capacity to learn to ‘see’ the other and ‘make oneself known’, which highlights one’s own self-knowledge and fosters growth in the other and in the self. Thus, ‘mutual care-taking’ is a fundamental aspect of learning” (1991, p. 58).

The development of this new learning requires a powerful sense of self but it also creates ability for the individual to accept criticism from the viewpoint of the critic and develop themselves further. This leads to the emotional dynamics of “collaboration as complex; it is charged both cognitively and emotionally” (John-Steiner, 2000, pg. 124). Collaboration is an emotionally charged activity because it involves gaining insight into yourself and others. It involves the development of emotional resources different from those needed when working in isolation. Methods and styles differ and negotiations must be made. Partners “need to learn to listen carefully to each other to hear their words echoed through those of the collaborator, and to hear the words of the other with a special attentiveness born of joint purpose” (John-Steiner, 2000, pg. 190).

The theoretical framework of Collaborative Learning focuses on the importance of collaborative learning being at the heart of professional learning communities. It is fundamental to understanding the implications of the collaborative. John-Steiner (2000) states:

“The principles in true collaboration represent complimentary domains of expertise. As collaborators not only do they plan, decide and act jointly, they also think together, combining conceptual schemes to create original frameworks. Also, in true collaboration, there is a commitment to shared resources, power and talent: no individual’s point of view dominates, authority for decisions and actions reside in the group, and work products reflect a blending of all participants contributions” (pgs. 40-41).
She concludes that in a world where the separateness of individuals is highly prized, there has to be a goal of constructing ‘we-ness’; that it is only through collaboration that people can grow as individuals and experience achievement. She claims that through collaboration, an individual’s capacities are deepened and at the same time, the participants discover a shared language, honest dialogue and the benefits of reciprocity.

Conclusion

Collaboration has been found to be a powerful tool for professional development and central for further opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practice. However, school districts continue to have difficulty both implementing and sustaining collaboration. The purpose of this research was to investigate the experience of the teacher in a creative, instructional collaboration and whether this sense of value enhanced the value of and connection to the school community. This topic was investigated through the lens of Vera John-Steiner’s Collaboration theory in order to focus on the importance of collaborative learning for teachers.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

Using the theoretical framework of Collaborative Learning theory by Vera John-Steiner, this study investigated the following question:

**What is the experience of the teacher in a creative instructional collaborative in the context of a faith-based school?**

The purpose of this literature review was to place the study within the context of teacher preparation and professional development. The literature was also used to examine the differences between cooperation and collaboration in order to examine the different experiences of teacher in a creative, instructional collaborative. It also noted the importance of the Jewish day school to American education. This literature review sought to answer questions on the meaning of teacher experience as it related to collaboration. In order to better understand the value of professional development it was necessary to examine the history of teacher preparation and professional development to determine the intersection between the past and the present.

Preparation for Classroom Teachers

There was a time in our nation’s history when few believed that elementary teachers needed a college education or that teaching required professional preparation.

Prior to the eighteenth century, Fraser (2007) states many college students who prepared to teach moved into other professional forms of employment. In fact, 40% of Harvard’s Colonial graduates took up teaching but only 3% stayed with teaching as a lifelong career (pg. 25). Teaching was seen as a transitional career. The early decades of the 19th century saw a change in teacher
preparation and formal programs of preparation began to emerge. One of the most significant of these formal programs was the Normal School. The Normal schools provided a brief, two-year course of study to help students master the subjects they would teach and acquire techniques for managing instruction (Fraser, 2007). Cremin (1953) noted that the Normal School offered a curriculum that emphasized the “professional treatment of subject matter” (pg. 52). The ‘professional treatment of subject matter’ was the belief that a teacher’s knowledge of subjects differed from academic knowledge. How this distinctive kind of instruction in which ‘the method of the subject’ became the point of attention, quickly drew attention and became the standard for training (Cremin, 1953). Borrowman (1956) define the ‘method of the subject’ as teaching the subject itself (Writing, for example) but just as importantly, the courses engaged students in reflection on their experience as learners as a way of sensitizing them to the experiences that their students would have. Borrowman (1956) noted that Normal schools had a clear sense of their mission and they championed the idea of teaching as a noble vocation. Their major purpose was to serve the profession of teaching by educating practitioners and they “glorified and supported the ideal of superb craftsmanship” (pg. 12). However Clifford and Guthrie (1988) noted that the Normal schools, while revolutionary, “were never the single-minded and essential teacher education centers that their supporters had wished” (pg. 61) It was intended to be a professional school devoted solely to the preparation of teachers with the dominating concern being practical pedagogy. However, over time, the student gaps in knowledge became the new impetus in teacher learning (Clifford & Guthrie, 1988). Yet they had made a significant enough impact as to prompt liberal arts colleges to prepare secondary teachers.

Liberal arts colleges offered a classical education. They inducted students into a common body of cultural knowledge and they fostered intellectual habits and skills deemed necessary for
continued learning. They sought to develop humane values and a sense of social responsibility. Silberman (1971) states that the liberal arts tradition construed education itself as a liberal art – “the study of education is the study of almost every question of importance…there can be no concept of the good life or the good society apart from a concept of the kind of education needed to sustain it” (pg. 384).

The liberal arts colleges were the catalysts that prompted the formation of teacher colleges and university schools of education. This was part of a movement to professionalize the occupation of teaching and to establish it as a dignified career (Wise, Darling-Hammond, & Berry, 1987). This prompted the study of the science of education through research and research then became the overriding concern as opposed to preparing teachers for classrooms (Wise et al., 1987). Teacher colleges and universities embraced experimental and quantitative methods which prompted the discovery of the general laws of learning. As a result, higher education became separated from models of practice and they were no longer interested in studying classroom problems and developing exemplary training sites (Clifford & Guthrie, 1988). The science of education through research became the focus and education research and the psychology of learning became the interest. Teaching in and of itself carried little status and thus led to a shortage in teachers. This led universities like Harvard to develop the Master of Arts in Teaching degree and the Graduate School of Education at Harvard in the 1930s. It was thought that by encouraging teachers to obtain advanced degrees, their status would improve (Powell, 1980). While the Master of Arts in Teaching degree did not last it led to a need to develop graduate programs to encourage graduates to reconsider the teaching profession and professionalize teaching (Wise et al., 1987). This afforded teaching and education a more respected stance. This more advanced status, along with the passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which set the minimum required working age
for boys at 14, (Hanson, 2000) saw a rise which doubled elementary school enrollment and in turn, increased high school enrollment by 460% (Fraser, 2007, pg. 147). This prompted the National Survey of the Education of Teachers to conduct a study by the US government that found that standards for teachers in colleges and universities was too low and so colleges and universities were forced to increase their minimum standards and become more selective in their entrance requirements. This provided more uniformity in the education curriculum and in teacher salaries nationwide (Fraser, 2007).

Although the Department of Education was created in 1867 as a way to collect information on schools that would help states establish effective school systems, it was not until 1958 that the connection between student needs and teacher preparation was stimulated with the passage of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA), in response to the launch of Sputnik. America needed to compete with the Soviet Union and the federal government became focused on ensuring that highly trained individuals would be available to help the United States compete in the fields of science and technology. It was decided that those highly trained individuals were the teachers in the classroom and professional development became focused on science and technology and the ‘gifted’ student, or “Children and youth with outstanding talent who perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment” (USDOE, 1993). This was done in order to ensure that the U.S. remained competitive in the space race. It also ended the question as to whether or not federal funding would lead to federal control of education but the fear of Russia quickly had Americans agreeing that federal funding was the answer to the Russia problem.

Shortly thereafter the DOE addressed a great divide in educational performance between poverty and non-poverty students which prompted the launch of the Head Start Program in an
effort to bridge this gap (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). The program was launched as an eight-week summer program by the Office of Economic Opportunity in 1965. It was designed to help break the cycle of poverty by providing preschool children of low-income families with a comprehensive program to meet their emotional, social, health, nutritional, and psychological needs (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1999). Subsequently, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of the same era provided funds to attract young people to teaching but this did not bridge the gap between student performances enough (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1999).

While teaching originally began as a transitional career, the efforts of the Normal schools, liberal arts colleges, teacher colleges and Masters Programs, have brought teaching into fruition as a dignified career. The federal government continues to try to equip states with any information needed to produce effective schools and bridge gaps in learning. The implications for the proposed research study demonstrate that teachers have been solely responsible for student success. While recent legislature promotes more collaboration among teachers and staff, it is still not the venue primarily used. Therefore this study is necessary to investigate the teacher experience in order to gain an understanding of a collaborative instructional event.

Professional Development for Classroom Teachers

The various gaps among the student’s performance over the decades were not the only gaps; there were also the gaps in teacher preparation. Between 1890 and 1930, the rapid rise of high school enrollment prompted teacher professional development in an attempt to bridge the gap in knowledge between teacher preparation and the demands of effective secondary education in order to prepare students for post-secondary studies.
Professional development took the form of motivational speaking and teachers wanted additional preparation as a follow-up to these speeches but there was much confusion as to what constituted teacher preparation (Fraser, 2007). In the early 1900s, a new system of teacher preparation and accreditation emerged which created a powerful link between high schools and universities. A college teaching certificate prompted curriculums for high schools and hence, elementary schools and it led to the requirement of a teaching degree for all teachers and the development of state standards for curriculums (Fraser, 2007). Professional development now centered on bridging the gaps in teacher education programs and creating uniformity in teacher knowledge. The Carnegie Foundation established by Andrew Carnegie in 1911 "to promote the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding" (Carnegie Foundation of New York, 2014) addressed the need in several reports during the 1930s and 1940s. From these reports, definitions for the various educational levels emerged from elementary to high school to college and university (Fraser, 2007) which created a new system of teacher certification that focused on the specific educational needs of student levels. Professional development was now aimed at bridging the gap in accreditation for teachers (Arlington & McGill-Franzen, 1999).

In the decades of the 1950s and 1960s the National Survey of the Education of Teachers (US DoE, 1993) enhanced professional development by shifting their focus from closing gaps to becoming more progressive. This included instruction and application of the theories of leading educational researchers. There was a return to the academic content of curriculums but professional education declined in quality and was not as readily available as teachers needed them to be, a condition that Neil (1986) attributed to a change in emphasis from classroom practice to “1) large-scale programming, 2) disregard of teacher evaluation with the emphasis on curriculum planning 3) ignorance of the teacher’s role, and 4) systematic management that glossed over
underlying value assumptions” (pg. 6). The 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* (1983) concluded that teachers were underqualified to provide this system of learning and were underpaid as well. As a result, a new standards movement which included: improved teacher education, restructuring the teaching force; and giving teachers greater say in the requirements for student achievement, emerged. This led to the formation of the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (2001) that shifted the teaching model to focus on Hunter’s (1989) Instructional Theory into Practice model, which proclaimed that teachers were the decision makers in the classroom and provided a model for both teaching and learning. The focus now became the lesson plan and the components of an effective lesson, which included: objectives for the lesson; the standards on which the lesson was based; an anticipatory set; the modeling and input form the teacher in regards to the lesson; guided practice, closure and independent practice (Heath, 2003). Teachers were trained to include them systematically in their instruction and they were then evaluated on their implementation of these skills. The Hunter model was present in all school professional development activities (Goodman, 1995).

Professional development once again shifted in 2001 with the passage of No Child Left Behind which mandated new standards for professional development. Professional development opportunities for teachers must now help teachers develop instructional practices that are collaborative in nature (NCLB, 2008). In order to accomplish this, schools began forming professional learning communities in an attempt to have teachers collaborate in order to remedy student deficits and work together to satisfy student educational needs. Schools began focusing their professional development on teacher collaboration for student achievement.

Historically, administrators have favored the workshop approach in professional development, in which a district or school brings an outside consultant or curriculum expert into
the school for a staff development day to give teachers a one-time training seminar on a pedagogic or subject-area topic. These workshops have been criticized for their lack of continuity and coherence and have, in theory, fallen out of favor (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Beginning in the late 1990s, literature began to support an alternative to the workshop that stated that for teacher learning to truly matter, it needs to be in a more active and coherent intellectual environment – one which ideas can be exchanged and an explicit connection to the bigger picture of school improvement is made. This vision holds that professional development should be sustained, coherent, take place in the school day and become part of the teacher professional responsibilities and focus on student results (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009).

Several popular models for site-based staff development matured during the 2000s, including professional learning communities. In this model, teachers in grade-level or content-area teams meet several times a week to collaborate on teaching strategies and solve problems. It was intended that teachers set common instructional goals, teach lessons in their individual classrooms, administer informal assessments to determine student level of mastery, and then regroup as a team to analyze the data and pinpoint areas of success, areas for improvement and set goals for future teaching (Honowar, 2008). These types of practices were often paired with other opportunities for deepening practice, including observing fellow teachers and working one-on-one with classroom-based ‘coaches’ or content experts (Keller, 2007). Kennedy (2011) found that informal, unplanned collaboration generated an interest in professional development in collaboration rather than the formal planned approach because teachers found it more useful and it enabled them to learn and support the success of the collaboration. Leonard (2003) also noted that the set–up for professional development is not supportive to collaboration and is often counter-productive and Musanti & Pence (2010) found that professional development was not used to build professional learning
communities or spark collaboration but was instead used to ‘fix’ teachers and provide them with knowledge that administrators felt they were lacking.

DuFour (2005) suggests that professional development should not be regarded as a distinct or detached experience to improve a practice; rather it should be regarded as an inherent outcome of organizational management strategies thereby making professional development activities a fundamental component of daily routines. Roberts & Pruitt (2009) cite obstacles associated with transitioning schools from traditional models of professional development to those that reflect collaboration, most importantly, school culture. According to Phillips (1996) school culture is the beliefs, attitudes and behaviors which are observable throughout a school community. Peterson (2002) suggests that culture is enduring; consequently it influences how people think, feel and act and current collaborative communities do not provide the opportunity to imbed caring as a critical component of school culture (Hargreaves & Giles, 2003). Therefore, common goals, staff stability, shared curriculum and honest communication (Wagner, 2006) are not part of the school culture and transformation, and the shift in awareness (Stoll & Seashore-Louis, 2007) cannot occur. DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour (2005) claim that schools only exist as collaborative communities when educators not only transform their practices, but also themselves. Whatever the method, quality professional development relies on a two-part transfer of knowledge: 1) it must inculcate in teachers new knowledge and skills such that they change their behavior and 2) those changes must subsequently result in improved student mastery of subject matter (Sawchuk, 2010).

The overriding ideas behind professional development are that increased knowledge helps teachers improve student achievement because professional development focuses on what each teacher needs to fine-tune their classroom practice. It is vital to school success but it is costly, often based on vaguely determined goals and there is a lack of data on resulting teacher and school
improvement. Perhaps this is because all of the professional development is focused on student achievement and often, teachers are under duress to achieve their prescribed goals. Today, the current form of professional development is teacher collaboration through the professional learning community. Despite all of the data that shows that collaboration improves student achievement, statistics show that only 56% of districts train teachers in collaboration and of those, only 5%-10% continue collaboration (Kohn, 2002). Perhaps this is because of the failure to connect the teacher experience to collaboration.

Although the Normal school no longer exists, perhaps some of its theories are still relevant; in particular, the idea of the ‘matter of the subject’. The Normal school developed a distinct type of instruction in which the ‘matter of the subject’ became the point of attention – in other words, the learner. In professional development the teacher is the learner and yet there is little attention paid to the ‘matter of the subject’ in terms of what the teacher hopes to derive from the professional development. In addition, the liberal arts college ideas of the Holmes Group (1986) states that teachers should have “an intense, prolonged, integrated experience that would fuse knowledge, understanding, skills and outlook into an “active whole” (Powell, 1980, pg. 109) These could provide meaningful connections to current professional development practices.

Today, educational reform is supported by a series of well-researched and documented programs and reports to facilitate the enhancement of teacher capacity and expertise. Educational scholars and policy makers demand professional development opportunities for teachers to help them enhance their knowledge and develop instructional practices. Yet despite recognition of its importance, the professional development currently available to teachers does not address on-going professional learning and the overall growth development of teachers.
Although there is much research on teacher collaboration and the impact of collaborative learning for students, there is little current research on how it benefits the teachers as individuals. The purpose of this study will be to lend insight on the experience of the teacher in a creative instructional collaborative.

Cooperation versus Collaboration

This section of the literature review examined what comprises much of collaboration in schools today and the differences between cooperation and collaboration. It is important to understand the nuances of both cooperation and collaboration as they are fundamentally different. Many districts believe that cooperation is a form of collaboration. This next section explains the important differences in both and why, in fact, cooperation is not a form of collaboration. This section examined the unique niche that is the Jewish day school, not only for the purposes of that serving that niche, but also because there is generalizability to other school settings.

Cooperation

Collaboration in schools today is “cooperative – working together to accomplish shared goals” (Smith, 1996). For public school that shared goal is meeting the federal standards currently in place. For private schools, it is maintaining the same standards as public schools in order to remain competitive. However, cooperation tends to be isolationist as it confines the task to be accomplished by dividing it among participants where “each person is responsible for a portion of the problem-solving” (McInerney & Robert, 2004, pg. 70). Tasks are divided among groups and sub-tasks are then assigned to teachers. It is focused on working together on separate tasks to create an end-product. Kohn (2002) saw it as a “gimmick to perk up the classroom” (pg. 3) but he felt it failed to address specific questions and problems after the implementation of new programs and
that there was no time for “careful reflection” (pg. 3) for either the staff or the administration. Cooperation is further isolationist as it is data-driven and each teacher is required to do their assigned part and bring their results to share with their group. Nelson (2005) believes it promulgates “assembly-line teaching” (pg. 65) in order to “not get in each other’s way” (pg. 65). He also believes it is destructive as it is meant to ‘fix’ teachers. It is focused on teacher-knowledge gaps and only adds to teacher stress and trust issues as teachers are seen as “consumers of academic researcher’s findings” (Christianakis, 2010.)

Kruse et al. (1995) state that the establishment of shared values and norms are what is critical in collaboration and provides the foundation on which the community grows. King & Newmann (2001) note that the emphasis of professional learning community formation should be to unite members by learning as a collective group rather than as individual learners.

Cooperation is also very traditional in that it is based on old techniques but new knowledge. Teachers are given very little control of the curriculum and district and school administrators prefer the “well-packaged programs” (Little, 2001, pg. 3) of staff development which are readily managed and evaluated but these programs offer teachers only passive roles and they continue to be offered in a ‘workshop-style menu’ which is fragmented in content, form and continuity at precisely the time when teachers are confronted with the challenge of redesigning schools (Little, 2001).

Finally, cooperative learning is based on contrived collegiality, which is the idea that collegiality is “administratively regulated, compulsory, implementation-oriented, fixed in time and space, and predictable and “this type of collegiality does not generally lead to meaningful or sustainable change” (Hargreaves, 1994, pg. 193). While it is aimed at collaboration, it goes awry for several reasons. To begin, it does not take into account the micro-politics of schools. Hargreaves (1994) explains that “the micro-political perspective encourages us to discriminate
between the different forms that collaboration and collegiality take” (pg. 191). Collaboration is where “working relationships between people tends to be spontaneous, voluntary, development-oriented, pervasive across time and space, and unpredictable” (pg. 193). This is not compatible with school systems where cooperative learning groups are in place because they are based on “decisions about curriculum and evaluations that are highly centralized” (Datnow, 2011, pg. 148). Hargreaves (2001) further notes that this self-invested collaboration (collaboration to improve scores) lacks rigor and that conflict avoidance collaboration (failure to make AYP) does not support collegiality and Datnow (2011) noted that teacher collaboration with the barrier of contrived collaboration could be harmful to an organization. Cooperative learning therefore, does not bring about real change. Finally, John-Steiner states that cooperation is still about the individual and not the collective; that it is the shared vision of the group and the collaborative interaction that helps achieve those outcomes.

Collaboration

Creative collaboration as defined by McInerney & Robert (2004) is “a method that implies working in a group of two or more to achieve a common goal, while respecting each individual’s contributions to the whole” (pg. 205). It is a working relationship between teachers that is “spontaneous, voluntary, development-oriented, pervasive across time and space and unpredictable” (Datnow, 2011, pg. 148). A teaching collaborative is at its most collaborative when it is student-centered for teacher learning by being centered on curriculum and pedagogy instead of bridging gaps among its student population (Christianakis, 2010). Collaboration is a learning process that not only has meaning but also allows individuals to exert control over their professional lives. This control is power over their learning and motivation to self-reflect (Bandura, 2006). Collaborative models allow teachers to “control the events that affect their lives” (Bandura,
1997, pg. 1) and develop a “belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, pg. 3). Teacher collaborative teams can “transform the nature of adult interaction and learning in school by engaging teachers in the same process of continual learning and improvement that we ask our students to strive for in their work” (Chappuis, Chappuis, & Stiggins, 2009, pg. 60). Hargreaves (1994) states that collaboration breaks down the feelings of isolationism by teachers and Hord (2007) reveals that participants reported diminished feelings of isolation and increased collaboration after learning as a community.

Collaboration has powerful implications for collective learning. Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin (1995) states that the “key to professional growth for collective learning are structures that break down isolation, empower teachers with professional tasks, and provide areas for thinking through standards of practice” (pg. 350). Hatch (2007) asserts that true collaboration brings teachers together to assess their students’ understanding; design; plan and implement new instructional practices’ and reflect on their own teaching” (pg. 350). He states that this model of collaboration is “likely to be effective and enduring when those responsible for its implementation are included in the decision-making process” (pg. 71). A study done by Jarzabkowski (2002) noted that the social interactions of collaboration – not just collegiality – improved the quality of teaching and learning as well as the sense of community among teachers and found that these healthy, collaborative relationships had a profound and lasting effect on teacher’s personal and professional lives and contributed positively to the collective efficacy of the organization. When teachers are given the ability to construct curriculum with their colleagues, they are most likely to construct it with the student in mind (Christianakis, 2010). When the student, and not the teacher, is the focus of curriculum and pedagogy construction, the teachers share in the process of knowledge creation
(Kozar, 2010; John-Steiner, 2000). It becomes constructivist in nature and the collaboration created through the togetherness of teacher-centered change now creates a sense of liberation (Kozar, 2010). Teachers are under less stress to strengthen their performance and now feel supported by a system that allows their voices to affect curriculum, pedagogy and policy (Kozar, 2010).

A Grossman, Winesburg, & Woolworth (2001) study found that when collaboration is based on curriculum and pedagogy, it is constructivist and becomes inquiry-based (curriculum-centered), which allows for “the possibility of individual transformation as well as the transformation of the social settings within the individual’s work” (pg. 158). Merrick (2007) found that the teacher interaction encouraged by inquiry-based research stimulated changes in teacher cognition and led to changes in teacher’s individual instructional practices. The Foltos (2002) and Sigurdardottir (2009) studies both found that collaborative learning by way of inquiry-based research (curriculum-centered) contributed most to positive feelings of teacher efficacy, which promoted teacher effectiveness, fostered collegiality and further strengthened the collaboration.

Graham (2007) found that collaboration has the potential to transform interactions and school cultures and Nelson (2005) found that this transformation fostered organizational support for continued teacher collaboration and a professional learning community that contributed to teacher collaboration.

A Troman (2000) study found that the trust developed in healthy collaborative relationships impacted the macro, meso, and micro factors of the organization as a whole and increased student achievement. A follow-up study by O’Neil & Conzemius (2002) found that “schools showing continuous improvement in student results are those whose cultures are permeated by: a shared focus, reflective practice, collaboration and partnerships…characterized by individuals who focus on student learning, reflect on student achievement and learn as collaborative teams” (pg. 136).
The Goddard, Goddard & Moran (2007) and Hipp, Huffman, Pankake & Olivier (2008) studies also effectively linked teacher collaboration to student achievement but it also noted that some members of the teaching staff met collaboration with resistance and unwillingness when teacher collaboration was done strictly for student achievement. However, when teacher collaboration was done for school improvement and teachers were given opportunities to collaborate on curriculum, instruction, and professional development, they were satisfied and the results were gains in student achievement on high-stakes testing. Thus, collaborative practices are critical for successful professional development and student achievement because they act as a catalyst for teachers to establish networks of relationships, which enable them to reflect, share practices, revisit their teaching and learning philosophies and guild knowledge (Achinstein, 2002; Chan & Pang, 2006).

The Jewish day school is the perfect venue to study the experience of teachers in a creative instructional collaborative as it is reflective of the larger American education system but small enough to facilitate the development of best practices in collaboration.

The Importance of the Jewish Day School

Jewish educational endeavors reflect developments in general education (Schiff, 1995). Because of the dual nature of the Jewish day school program (general and religious studies), it is particularly affected by changes in American education (Schiff, 1995) where there is a strong emphasis on the sciences and math and a deeper concern for the special training of talented youth (Schick, 2013). New teaching materials and teaching aids have been developed and efforts have been made to improve classroom methodology and technology (Schiff, 1995). There is an increased consciousness of the importance of education and parents are becoming more aware of the needs of their children and more involved in the curriculums (Schiff, 1995). There is now greater intensity in the learning with the passing of federal educational acts like No Child Left
Behind. Developments like these in general education have placed a greater responsibility upon the Jewish day school. While private schools are not required by law to follow federal mandates, compliance is still necessary in order to remain competitive in a market flooded with public school alternatives (Schiff, 1995).

The problem of competing schools is an issue not only to the Jewish day schools but also to the public schools as there is a variety of schools now available to meet the educational needs of children, and since Jewish day schools are dependent on tuition, remaining competitive in this market is vital to longevity (Schiff, 1995). In addition, the average Jewish day school is sufficiently small enough to facilitate the development of desirable teacher personnel practices such as collaboration (Schiff, 1995). This makes it an excellent forum for establishing practices and policies that can then be transferred to larger schools.

A recent study done by the Education Jewish Project (2013) has confirmed that there is an approach that the Jewish community schools should be taking very seriously and that is collaboration. It embraces the theory that creativity and innovation emerge when people collaborate and it empowers them and develops trust that enables them to tackle far-reaching issues in their environments. With these interconnections, creativity has surfaced and it has had a deep impact on the school and as a community at large (Bernstein, 2013).

In the study, From Teacher Isolation to Professional Collaboration: An Experiment in School Change (2014) Kasloff identifies the impact teacher collaboration has had on the Jewish community of Denver. As teachers became invested in the practice and included as a voice through their respective collaborations, leaders in the community became involved and changes were made that not only affected the curriculum and closed the gaps in education, but met the financial needs.
of the school as well. The community became closer as a unit and more vested in the school and the teachers were seen as partners in learning and advocates for education.

Conclusion

By examining collaboration within the context of the history of both teacher preparation and professional development, we have seen that there has been a marked shift of focus from the teacher to the student. The research has made it clear that when teachers are given a voice and they feel that they are changing curriculum and pedagogy, they are more likely to create different and ongoing collaborations because the learning gained by the teacher, as well as the student, fosters the desire for continued collaboration (Kozar, 2010). The research also indicated that teachers develop more confidence and feel less pressure when they are collaborating to create a curriculum to further advance their students and not merely cooperating together to remedy problems that exist in their teaching (Bandura, 2006). Teachers become more likely to continue the collaboration because they are now a professional community of learners sharing knowledge (Brownell et al., 2004; John-Steiner, 2000). The Jewish day school provides a unique opportunity to study collaboration in a forum with great generalizability to the larger public school system. Further research on how individual teachers experience a creative instructional collaborative activity is therefore required in order to help principals, curriculum coordinators and educational policy makers further their expertise in providing effective training in collaboration.
Chapter Three

Research Design

The purpose of this research was to describe the teacher experience in a creative instructional collaborative. The identified problem of practice was the observed discrepancy in connecting collaboration to a teacher’s professional growth. In order to describe the teacher experience in a creative instructional collaborative, an interpretative phenomenological analysis was required for the investigation which answered one question:

*What is the experience of the teacher in a creative instructional collaborative in the context of a faith-based school?*

The intent of this study was to document the experiences of a particular group of educators constructing a curriculum collaboratively for an 8th grade in order to determine the teacher experience from this planned collaborative experience.

Methodology

A qualitative methodology was selected to lend insight into the meaning teachers constructed from a creative instructional collaborative experience. Creswell (2007) defines qualitative research as “beginning with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (pg. 37). Qualitative researchers seek to understand the perspectives of participants in a context, thereby making it a good choice for a school setting.
Phenomenological psychology is where an individual’s personal account of an event is used to produce a subjective view, as opposed to producing an objective statement of the event (Smith, Jarman, & Osbourne, 1999). Symbolic interactionism believes that the meanings individuals ascribe to events should be of central importance to the social scientist but also notes that meanings are only obtained through a process of interpretation; the way people perceive an experience is related directly in how they talk about and behave in relation to the event (Dean, Smith, & Payne, 2006). Meanings occur as a result of these interactions (Smith, 1996).

An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was chosen for this study. The aim of the IPA is to understand the participant’s view of the phenomenon from an insider’s perspective of the phenomenon in question. IPA notes that one cannot gain access to the participant’s personal world without the use of the researcher; that access is dependent on the researcher’s ability to make sense of the participant’s personal world. The researcher plays a significant role in the process and is required to make sense of the data by engaging in an interpretative relationship with the transcript.

Phenomenology is a dynamic interplay among research activities in which a phenomenon is determined and a reflection of the central themes of the phenomenon is written as a description. In research, a phenomenon is the topic studied by the researcher and it is the topic described by the participants in the study. The descriptions are then interpreted for the meanings of the various participants’ experiences (Creswell, 2007). It explores in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world and the meaning of those particular experiences for the participants. Husserl is a central figure in developing phenomenology as a philosophical movement (Ashworth, 2003). The core philosophical basis of Husserl’s approach was a rejection that there is anything more fundamental than experience. Husserl argued that scientific approaches
are inappropriate as human meanings are the key to studying lived experiences. This is a critical component of IPA as researchers have come to appreciate the sense-making processes of their participants (Ashworth, 2003). The IPA emphasizes that the research exercise is a dynamic part of the process with an active role for the researcher in that process (Smith & Olson, 2006). It is concerned with trying to understand what it is like from the point of view of the participants, to take their side. It involves critical questions of the participants as a “cognitive, linguistic, affective and physical being” (Smith & Olsen, 2006, pg.54) and it assumes a “chain of connection between people’s talk and their thinking and emotional state” (Smith & Olsen, pg. 54). An IPA has been chosen for this study because the problem of teacher collaboration is important to understand from several individual’s shared experiences in order to understand these experiences to gain a deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon.

IPA has been informed by three key areas of the philosophy of knowledge: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation and is the second theoretical underpinning of IPA. Within hermeneutics, interpretation is considered an art whereby the analyst is able to offer an understanding to an experience. Within this theory the relationship between the interpreter and the interpreted is acknowledged and highlighted. Smith & Olsen (2008) discuss that in IPA a double hermeneutic is involved whereby the researcher is trying to make sense of their world thus recognizing that the production of an interpretative account is a function of the relationship between a researcher and participant and is constructed and shaped by their encounter. The production of an interpretative account is iterative, based on the concept of the hermeneutic circle (Smith & Osborn, 2008). One moves back and forth through a range a multiple ways of looking at
the data, whereby to understand any given part, one looks at the whole and to understand the whole one needs to look at the parts.

Finally, ideography is a major influence on IPA. An ideographic approach is concerned with the particular by investigating, in detail, how particular lived experiences have been understood from the perspective of a small group of particular people in a particular context (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

IPA was chosen for this study because it is an insider’s perspective. This allowed the researcher to explore in detail how participants made sense of their world. It was embedded in symbolic interactionism, how meanings are constructed by individuals (Smith & Osborn, 2008). IPA views individuals as experts on their own experiences and can therefore offer researchers an understanding of their thoughts, commitments and feelings through their own stories, in their own words, in as much detail as possible (Smith, Flowers, & Olson, 2005). Its underlying philosophy is that there is no objective reality. Rather, people’s experiences are influenced by their perceptions. Simultaneously, IPA emphasizes that research is a dynamic and interpretative process in which a researcher’s attempts to make sense of a participant trying to make sense of their experience which results in the double hermeneutics process (Smith & Osborn, 2008). IPA highlights the value of considering a researcher’s role in influencing the process (Smith & Osborn, 2008). As a researcher’s own views and beliefs will influence an interpretation of a participant’s account, IPA stresses the importance of reflexivity to aid transparency. It recognizes that the production of an interpretative account is a function of the relationship between a researcher and participant, constructed and shaped by their encounter (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006).

IPA helps to provide new and differing perspectives on a phenomenon by learning from those who are experiencing it (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The ideographic nature of IPA fits with the
objective of this research which was to investigate in detail the individuals rather than generalizing notions for larger populations (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Participants

The interpretative phenomenological analysis was conducted at a private, Jewish day school in the northeastern United States. The case study participants included five 8th grade faculty who designed a curriculum on the Holocaust for each of their respective classes for fifty-three students for the 2014-2015 school year. All but one of the teachers had been employed by the organization for a minimum of five years so they had a thorough understanding of the community and organization and a commitment to their jobs. The group was constructed to represent all ranks of teachers in the program including: full-time, part-time and support staff of General studies teachers (Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies). All had previous experience teaching 8th grade. All participants were between the ages of 45-60 years of age and all had been teaching their subject areas for over ten years.

In addition, this particular group was chosen because they exemplified the question raised in the problem of practice – they are a group of faculty implementing a collaborative unit of study with a focus on their own personal experience while also trying to work in the larger context of the group. At the same time, they were trying to meet the needs of their administration and their students. The goal of this research was to identify the experience teachers had in a creative, instructional collaborative.

The research was done in a private, Jewish day school and may not be adequately representational of a public school population. The research was done in an 8th grade middle school which is departmentalized. These participants formed a purposive sample. A purposive sample is
also commonly called a judgmental sample. It is a sample that is selected based on the knowledge of a population and the purpose of the study. It was a unique group that was well suited to examine the study.

Data Collection

Materials. Interpretative phenomenological analysis involves interpreting the “texts of life” (vanManen, 1990, pg.4). The interviews are semi-structured because this allows engagement in dialogue whereby the initial questions are modified in light of the participants’ responses. The investigator is able to probe interesting and important ideas (Smith & Olsen, 2006). The investigator generates probing questions prior to the interview but asks them only in the event that the participant’s response prompts it. The investigator focuses on gathering data that will lead to a textural and structural description of the experience and subsequently provides an understanding of the common experiences of the participants.

Analytic Memos – Analytic memos are write-ups about what the researcher thinks he/she is learning during the course of their evaluation (Gibbs, 2007). They are typically written both during and after data collection. Analytic memos are not only written about the process of collecting data but more importantly, what the researcher is seeing in the data (Gibbs, 2007). Memos can be summaries of findings or comments and reflections on particular aspects of the evaluation. It is also an outlet for a researcher to think about what additional data might be helpful in order to fully ‘tell the story’ (Gibbs, 2007). Writing analytic memos is a critical aspect of IPA and can help immensely in writing the results as it provides the basis of the researcher’s analysis that will end up in the final report (Krueger, 2014). It can provide a summary of the patterns found in the data (Krueger, 2014).
Procedures

Smith & Osborn (2008) recommend the use of the semi-structured interview for an IPA study. They facilitate a more informal, flexible conversation which enables the interviewer to probe particular areas of interest that arise or follow areas pertinent to the research question. A semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix A) was developed based on relevant literature, discussion with research supervisors and relevant guidance on constructing an interview schedule (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

IPA explores in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world. A small sample of the community is recommended because it is a “detailed interpretative account…and can only be realistically done on a very small sample (5-6) – thus in simple terms one is sacrificing breadth for depth” (Smith & Olsen, 2006, pg. 56). The respondents should be chosen based on their willingness to participate as well as the similarities and differences in the relationship between the elements being examined (vanManen, 1990). It is important to have individuals who have experienced the phenomenon being studied.

Guided interviews facilitate the participants’ ability to tell their own story in their own words. Questions will be initially delivered in an open-ended and non-directive style in order to get as close to the participants’ views as possible without them being led by the interviewer’s questions. The interviewer followed each interview by making detailed notes about the experience, recording initial thoughts, feelings and impressions as well as documenting anything that may affect the interview such as interruptions or salient points about the environment in which the interview took place.
Participants were interviewed at school in the privacy of their classrooms and each interview lasted 30-60 minutes and was audio recorded and transcribed, with all identifying information either removed or disguised.

In IPA, observations are solely done by the investigator during the interview. The investigator monitors the effect of the interview on the respondent and interprets them for meaning (Smith & Olsen, 2006). The written responses of the investigator along with the interview transcripts are examined for clusters of meaning in order to provide a textual description about the respondents’ experiences as well as their own.

**Figure 1 – Timeline**

![Timeline Diagram]

Data Analysis

The focus of IPA is to understand the essence of the experience. The phenomenon is the “abiding concern” (Smith & Olsen, 2006, pg. 31) and the interview responses should be interpreted for the meaning of the lived experience. A description of the phenomenon is written, maintaining a strong relation to the topic of inquiry (Smith & Olsen, 2006). Each interview transcript was analyzed individually. The process began by becoming familiar with each account by way of repeated reading and listening of each transcript, during which notes were made in the left-hand margins of the transcript to record anything interesting or significant about what each interviewee
stated. There was a summary of content as well as comments or connections, similarities, differences, contradictions and preliminary interpretations.

Transcripts were then re-read and the right-hand margins were used to document emerging themes. This involved moving to a higher interpretative level of abstraction, general enough to allow theoretical connections within and across cases while remaining grounded in what the participant actually said.

Moustakas (1994) describes this as horizontilization to develop clusters of meaning. A textual description is written as well as a description of the investigator’s own experience then a composite description of the ‘essence’ of the phenomenon is written. The power of IPA is that it is judged by the light it sheds within the broader context of the links readers make between the findings of an IPA study, their own personal and professional experience, and the claims of the extant literature (Moustakas, 1994). It is the chain of connection between people’s talk and their thinking and emotional state. Smith (2005) asserts that meaning is central and the aim is to try to understand the content and complexity of those meanings rather than the measure of their frequency. It’s an interpretative relationship within the transcript. The transcript is read numerous times; annotations are made; a free textual analysis is done where the investigator comments on the use of language or the persons themselves (their similarities/differences; echoes; amplifications and contradictions). There is a transformation of initial notes into themes; a connection of the themes; a making sense of the themes and finally, a master table of themes. The emergent themes will then be listed in order of appearance and attempts will be made to look for and make sense of connections between them, creating clusters. Smith & Osborn (2008) describe this process as a magnet “with some themes pulling others in, helping to make sense of them (pg 77). These clusters will be titled and will thereby create superordinate themes. At that point an identifier will be added
to aid in the analysis and to facilitate finding the original source. It will be essential to continually return to the transcripts throughout this process to verify that the superordinate themes are reflective of what the participant actually said.

This process was repeated for all five interviews, each interview in its own light respectively as separate and individual from the other interviews. Although commonalities in themes were identified, all issues were identified in each transcript as they emerged, thus paying attention to ways in which accounts from participants were similar or different (Smith & Osborn, 2008). When all five interviews had been analyzed and superordinate themes and theme clusters identified, a master list of themes and sub-themes was created and this provided a coherent framework for understanding the value of the participants assigned to the creative collaborative experience. The master list of themes and sub-themes were translated into a narrative account as the purpose of an IPA is to try to understand the content and complexity of the participant’s meanings rather than a measure of their frequency and it involves the investigator engaging in an interpretative relationship with the transcript. Care was taken to ensure that a distinction was made between what the participants said and the researcher’s interpretation.

An emic account of the data was written because it is a description of behavior in terms meaningful to the actor; that is, it comes from a person within the culture. It is the inside perspective of the researcher who strives to describe a particular culture in its own terms (Pike, 1967).
Smith (2005) describes three characteristic features of IPA: it is idiographic, inductive and interrogative. IPA is idiographic in the sense that it starts with the detailed examination of one case until some degree of saturation has been achieved, before the researcher moves on to the second
case. This process continues until all cases in the research have been examined. When all cases have been examined, only then can the researcher conduct cross-case analysis on the meanings and themes of each individual case for convergence and divergence. Smith (2005) recommends analysis of this type on a small sample size. The researcher should then be able to achieve two important goals associated with IPA which is to allow the reader to see clearly the themes which have emerged which the participant’s share, in addition to learning something about the life of the particular participants who have told of their experience.

IPA is inductive as it involves techniques which allow for unanticipated or unpredicted themes to emerge during analysis. Thus, IPA does not involve generating specific hypotheses based on the extant literature but rather generates broad research questions which then lend themselves to the collection of the expansive data. Smith (2005) states that IPA can be most exciting to uncover the unexpected while engaged with the material

IPA is interrogative as one of its central aims is to contribute to the existing body of literature, similar to mainstream psychology. Even though IPA involves in-depth analysis of small sample sizes, the results can be discussed in relation to the broader extant psychological literature.

Validity and Credibility

This project’s purpose was to provide an interpretative phenomenological analysis on the collaboration practices in an educational setting. The project’s goal was to observe and note the behaviors and feelings of a group of individuals collaborating on a project and to observe and make notes of the specific educational environment. In order to increase the study’s external validity, the researcher chose to select a sample base that was representative of a wide scope of individuals with varying backgrounds. The sample did not include or exclude because of religious belief or
affiliation and the researcher took pains to include those individuals that would enhance the demographics of the research base. Participants were selected based on the fact that IPA views individuals as experts on their own experiences and can therefore offer researchers an understanding of their thoughts, commitments and feelings through their own stories, in their own words, in as much detail as possible (Reed, Flowers, & Larken, 2005).

Reactivity is the response of the researcher and the research participants to each other during the research process (Maxwell, 2005). For all types of interviews the interviewer has a powerful and inescapable influence on the data collected (Maxwell, 2005). It is important is to understand how the interviewer is influencing what the interviewee says, and how to most productively use this influence to answer the research question. The researcher will keep a journal of analytic memos as well as provide each interviewee with an opportunity to check the data in order to address reactivity.

However, one cannot state that the findings of this research project can be generalized to apply to every school in every region of the United States. The researcher is confident, however, that every effort was made to present a clear representation of research data and to ensure internal and external validity from the project’s very inception.

The IPA research is a process of constructing a creative instructional collaborative. The author was a participant. By working as a collaborative group conducting inquiry in our development and implementation of a professional development model for collaborative learning, the author was able to experience the processes and it allowed for a deeper, richer understanding. The author maintained a reflexive attitude in order to avoid bias. Reflexivity acknowledges that meanings acquired from the analysis of transcripts are influenced by interpretation and the researcher’s intimate engagement with the participant’s transcripts. Reflexivity involves
interpretivist ontology and assumes the co-construction of meaning within a socially oriented research scenario. It offered a holistic approach and was embedded throughout the study.

Transferability was attained by providing a comprehensive description of all aspects of the research study including the participants and the research context (Krefting, 1991). They were described as thoroughly as possible throughout this study and while the study was conducted at a private, Jewish day school, it was done with secular studies teachers and can therefore be deemed valid among other middle school participants (VanderRiet & Durheim, 2006).

Dependability describes the extent to which the data reflects findings that are congruent with the research findings. For the purposes of this study dependability will be achieved by providing rich and thorough accounts of the development of events and situations during the research process. In order to enhance the dependability of the data process, the repeated reading of the transcripts and rechecking of themes will be applied (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Discrepant data was reported as a ‘Discrepancy Note’ in order to flag an item as incomplete or has having a result different than expected.

Conformability refers to the extent to which findings from the research process reflect the focus of the researcher (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1990). Phenomenological research acknowledges the researcher’s ongoing role in the research process. In order to ensure conformability, the researcher engaged in continuous supervision with the dissertation supervisor during the research process.

Limitations of IPA

IPA can be referred to as data-driven research rather than theory-driven research. That is, it is not typical of most research projects which commence with a predetermined set of hypotheses.
that the researcher wishes to confirm or refute (Shaw, 2011). This is because the data collection
methods in IPA often lend themselves to being more flexible and open-ended and it allows
participants to discuss their experiences. As a result IPA has the ability to uncover phenomenon
that may have been previously undiscovered. Additionally, the researcher plays an active role in
the research as they are required to make sense of the data collection.

Ethical approval for this study took place in 2015. Participation in this research did not
present obvious risks to the participants. The project documented the practices of the participants;
it did not impose any treatment that may have had negative consequences for the faculty or
students. Participation in this project did not put the well-being or rights of the faculty or students
at risk and the participants may in fact have benefitted from their participation in this project as
they were able to examine their own teaching practice and the teaching practices of their
colleagues. Participation in this project was voluntary and all participants were guaranteed the
protection of their rights with the utilization of an informed signed consent document which
contained the following elements adapted from Sarantakos (2005): identification of the researcher
and cooperating institution, participant selection procedures, research purpose, benefits of the
research participation, frequency and duration of participation, participant risks, confidentiality
guidelines, participant withdrawal procedures and contact information. This researcher provided
full disclosure of the research focus; the research’s intent and the voluntary nature of participation.
The researcher was particularly mindful of the vulnerability of teachers who participated in
qualitative research (Hatch, 2007). Therefore, the participants understood their ability to withdraw
from the study at any time.
Conclusion

This was an interpretative phenomenological analysis designed to lend insight into the teacher experience in a collegial instructional collaboration. It was done in a private Jewish day school in the northeastern United States with five members of the middle school staff. By focusing on middle school staff in the construction of a Holocaust unit, this study was able to be transferred to other school settings. IPA was chosen for this study to capture the complex and contextual nature of the teacher experience from a creative, instructional collaborative experience. In this way it hopes to add to the literature on teacher collaboration. This study was necessary in order to fill the gap in the literature by investigating the teacher experience in a creative instructional collaborative.
Chapter Four

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological study was to investigate the teacher experience in a creative, instructional collaborative within the context of a faith-based school. Although the research has examined the impact on student achievement resulting from professional development using instructional collaboratives, there was a gap in the research connecting collaboration to a teacher’s professional growth. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the lived experience of five eighth grade teachers from a private Jewish day school who volunteered to participate in the writing and teaching of an instructional unit that focused on the Holocaust. The research question under examination was:

What is the experience of the teacher in a creative instructional collaborative in the context of a faith-based school?

The data was collected over a period of several months. An individual in-depth interview was conducted following the completion of the collaborative experience. The purpose was to gain an understanding of their past experiences in collaborative activities and compare it to their experience with this collaboration.
### Figure 6 – Data Collection Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event:</th>
<th>Meeting as a group</th>
<th>Post-Collaborative Individual Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description:</td>
<td>Planning the curriculum.</td>
<td>Interview to gain meaning of the experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participants**

The participants were purposefully selected to participate. In order to document the experience of a group of teachers constructing a curriculum collaboratively, a cohort of 8th grade teachers was used. There were three females and two males who were responsible for curricular disciplines in Language Arts, Math, Science, History and Media. Their experience in the use of collaboration varied.

The teachers who participated in the study and their demographics are depicted in Table 5.

**Table 5 – Participant Data Table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Years of Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Years of Teaching Experience–Current School</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th>Years of Collaborative Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allen</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>10 (2 in public)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beatrice</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Language Arts</td>
<td>20 (5 in public)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Media Specialist</td>
<td>25 (0 in public)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delilah</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>15 (3 in public)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erica</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>18 (16 in public)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All but one of the participants had experience teaching in the public schools. One additional participant had spent the majority of her career in public schools with only two years of experience in this private school. The majority of the remaining participants had been in this Jewish school setting.

The Jewish Day School Experience

Jewish educational endeavors reflect developments in public education (Schiff, 1995). Because of the dual nature of the Jewish day school program (general and religious studies), it is particularly affected by changes in American education (Schiff, 1995) where there is a strong emphasis on the sciences and math and a deeper concern for the special training of talented youth (Schick, 2013). New teaching materials and teaching aids have been developed and efforts have been made to improve classroom methodology and technology (Schick, 2013). There is an increased consciousness of the importance of education and parents are becoming more aware of the needs of their children and more involved in the curriculums (Schick, 2013). There is now greater intensity in the learning with the passing of federal educational acts like No Child Left Behind. Developments like these in general education have placed a greater responsibility upon the Jewish day school. While private schools are not required by law to follow federal mandates, compliance is still necessary in order to remain competitive in a market flooded with public school alternatives (Schiff, 1995).

The average Jewish day school is sufficiently small enough to facilitate the development of desirable teacher personnel practices such as collaboration (Schiff, 1995). This makes it an excellent forum for establishing practices and policies that can then be transferred to larger schools. What also makes it an ideal setting for collaboration is the commitment of the staff to deep learning. Because the children study religiously, they are taught ‘deep reading’ of the Torah, which is to examine their weekly passages again and again and take from them every bit of meaning that
is central to their lives at that point. That being said, religious Jews as a rule, value education and the commitment it takes to learn. Subsequently, they also realize that it takes many people to educate a person. From their own experiences, they learn in synagogue, in school, in private homes weekly, and at charity events that take place regularly so they are familiar with the patience and commitment needed to educate. This also makes them a very tight knit community such that their child’s teacher may also be in their synagogue, their book circle, or their weekly charity challah baking activity. This breeds a spirit of collaboration because in order to work and live and be educated in the same circle of people daily, the community must learn to work together.

This deep sense of community and education prompted Harry Franco to enact upon a dream of building a school for his community in 1966. He, along with Saul Ashkenazi, began raising the funds needed to build the school. The elementary wing was built in 1977 and the middle school was added on in 1980. The preschool and high schools were added in the late 90’s and Founders Hall (a 2,000 seat auditorium) was added in 2015. The building now houses over 800 students from pre-K through 12th, and 85 teachers. It became a Middle States accredited school in 2011 and its graduates have been accepted into such prestigious schools as Columbia, Yale, Princeton, NYU, and Brown.

This sense of community breeds friendships and comradery the likes of which the researcher has never experienced. There are times when this sense of community can be frustrating, because while everyone appreciates the value of education, they are often skittish about asking for help for three reasons: 1 – I should not need help because this is something I’m supposed to know; 2 – Everyone else seems to know what they are doing, why don’t I? and 3 – Separation of church and state- I don’t want to ask for help from the same people I go out to dinner with. Work is work and home is home. It is difficult, but it is also very nice to know that there is a team of people who understand the value of education and are willing to support you in your endeavors to educate.
The Significance of the Unit of Study

There are significant events happening on our world today: the Black Lives Matter movement; the taking of a knee during the playing of the National Anthem; white supremacist rallies that end with young lives being lost or forever changed. But these events are not singular to this time; nor are they singular to this place.

Scapegoating, prejudice, and hate crimes have happened throughout history. One of the most significant of these events was the Holocaust. During the Holocaust religious, moral, and legal systems failed in deterring the dangers of prejudice, apathy, and indifference. These same dangers are present today. By studying the Holocaust, students learn to challenge preconceptions and understand the complex relationship between individual identity and universal identity.

Holocaust education engages students in critical thinking and self-reflection, by which they can make essential connections between history and the contemporary moral choices they confront in their own lives. During the Holocaust religious, moral, and legal systems failed in deterring the dangers of prejudice, apathy, and indifference. These same dangers are present today,

But Holocaust education cannot be taken lightly; nor can it be taught in a lighthearted manner to not make it ‘scary’. Asking students to play the role of a Nazi soldier and defend their position in the killing of Jews; or segregating one group of student to prove the effects of segregation is irresponsible.

Holocaust education provides a pathway for students to confront their present concerns involving loyalty, peer pressure, scapegoating, conformity and belonging. By studying the past to understand the present, they learn that human beings possess the power to control their behavior, so they become aware of the importance of making choices and come to realize that one person can
make a difference. Abolishing the civil rights of one group can lead to the abolition of those rights for all, so each person must take a stand against evil or eventually risk forfeiting all individual freedom.

**Participant Profiles**

**Allen**

Allen is an extremely bright, scientifically minded teacher. He has a Master’s degree in Chemistry and has successfully contributed to many scientific publications. All of his time is devoted to the study of various sciences, especially Earth science. He is married, without children, and teaches both enrichment classes as well as the high science tracks. He is outgoing and friendly and loves to discuss all things science.

Allen was not comfortable participating in the collaborative but was willing to try. When I first approached Allen about the idea of the collaboration, he moved to the opposite side of the room from me with his arms crossed, in a very defensive posture and reluctantly agreed. While he shared his previous experiences with me in the post-collaborative interview, he did comment on his prior feelings about a lack of being wanted and valued by staff as well as his colleagues: “The attitude here is’ Don’t play my pool’. My hands are tied. I can’t show what I can really do. I end up just being the resource for old manuals and cool gadgets – not really in on the ground floor of student learning.” I found Allen to be sad and a little lonely. He was quirky in nature and told me science jokes at inopportune times. He was clearly very bright. When speaking to him however, it was evident that he was awkward in social situations and my memos of his carriage and deportment at the initial meeting made me feel bad for Allen and his loneliness, and the fact that he felt so disconnected from the staff.
Allen, who has had one year of previous experience working within a collaborative, found
that being needed and wanted beyond the delivery of responsibility to his individual science
classroom was meaningful.

It was really amazing! I was part of a unit and my help was actually wanted! In fact, it was
requested! There was this one occasion that the Math teacher got stuck on something and
she asked me to come into her room to help her – in front of the students and everything!
She wasn’t afraid of looking bad and I don’t know…this was just such a stress-free project.
We weren’t under the gun by administration. We were just doing it for the kids. It was so
relaxed and fun and judgment free! It was, I don’t know, collegial! I really saw my
colleagues differently. Maybe it’s not me!

Allen was most impressed at the effect the collaboration had on the students. He felt that
the role-modeling that was done by the teachers provided an excellent example to the students of
both group work and the fact that all subjects are related in some way.

This relationship between subjects also applied to the relationship between teachers and
their relationship with students. Allen remarked,

No one was territorial! The kids and myself – we all benefited by seeing that everyone
shared everything and the students realized that everything doesn’t always have to be
compartmentalized! They can take knowledge from one class to solve problems in another!
The need for accomplishment; to make a difference in teaching and learning, was expressed
by Allen:

The fact that we weren’t under the gun to remEDIATE something was nice. We weren’t just
meeting to meet. We were meeting to plan and talk and then we actually left the meeting
and DID it! When we met again we didn’t rehash the same thing over and over. We talked
about strategies and problems and what else we could do. I found that I became better at
what I did and the students gained more. I was proud of myself. It made me love teaching again!

Allen was the most reluctant going into the collaborative and seemed so pleased at the outcome. He expressed so much frustration at his previous experiences with collaboration and the amount of wasted time meeting. The feelings of his reluctance to collaborate seemed to really be about the constant scrutiny he felt that he was under, as well as all the teachers. He hated the wasted time constantly haranguing teachers about a job poorly done. He felt that this collaborative was constructive and fun: “Usually we just meet to meet. And we meet so much here that we never have time to do anything but meet. And when we meet one person talks and everyone else is having these sidebar conversations. We never meet to plan anything. I loved that we met to plan something – not just talk. We actually DID something.” For Allen, the feeling of being able to constructively share with his colleagues deepened his commitment to the project and ultimately allowed for his personal growth. Allen loved the freedom with which he was able to work and not feel scrutinized:

We talked about strategies and problems and what else we could do – not what we weren’t doing. I found that I became better at what I did and the students gained more. I was proud of myself. It made me love teaching again!

Allen was probably the biggest change in personality that I was able to capture. The lonely, frightened, school boy had gained back his identity as teacher and science expert. He was so happy to have friends to share with and his personal sense of belonging directly affected his demeanor and subsequently, his teaching. He seemed like he now belonged and felt like part of the group; something he had longed for all along.
Beatrice

Beatrice is an exceptionally bright, motivated teacher who has experienced great success in teaching, including various awards for lesson plans as well as teacher of the year. She has certifications in Language Arts, Science and Math and a Master’s in educational administration. She is married with two grown children and currently in coursework to obtain her doctorate. She is very bright and charismatic and a popular teacher in school. She was vibrant and fun to interview and clearly liked by all, yet when it came to speaking about collaboration, she was sheepish and almost embarrassed at her natural teaching ability. She, like Allen, felt unwanted by the staff professionally; the ‘goody two shoes’, as she named herself, and her experiences with collaboration only helped to further fuel that.

Beatrice too had some prior experience with collaboration but it was more in the way of ‘pushing into’ classrooms in order to be a second set of hands to the teacher in the room. She helped with projects and papers, but did not participate in grading or in the actual collaboration of any unit of study. She found herself to be helpful to the teachers and a valued resource. Her demeanor was pleasant and she was happy to discuss her experiences. She did admit that she believed that this was not true collaboration but that she was happy with her role. She did recall one incident that greatly unsettled her and caused her to be wary of embarking on a similar style of collaboration:

I was asked by the principal to collaborate with a colleague on a writing lesson. I was thrilled! This teacher was an 18-year veteran in the field and I was still fairly new – maybe 5 years in. We had no common planning time so I asked my principal when we should meet and she said, “No! No! Just go into her room and teach a writing lesson. She should watch you and take notes on how you do it.” I was so confused. I met with the teacher later that day and wanted to discuss it and she said: “She’s (the principal) not happy with the way I
teach writing. Apparently the parents are complaining. She says you do it better and I should watch you and take notes.” I was mortified and embarrassed. I actually apologized to her and told her that I was not aware of the reason for doing this and it made me uncomfortable. She was sweet about it and we got it done but I felt so bad for her. It was terrible!

Beatrice came with five years of collaborative experience. She was excited about the relationships she developed with her colleagues as well as the sense of belonging she felt within the group as a whole, both personally and professionally:

This was cool. This was real. It was light and fun and all about the kids. This is what learning is supposed to look like. The kids watching us learn together and our watching them learn and grow. It was so much more meaningful that all subjects were involved. It was a better program. There is strength in numbers! These people really do want to work with me!

Beatrice was excited about the relationships she developed with her colleagues and the sense of mutual respect she experienced. Beatrice was animated when we spoke in the post-collaborative interview and had many positive things to say about her experience and about collaboration as a whole. She was excited about the relationships she developed with her colleagues as well as the sense of belonging she felt within the group as a whole: “I knew my colleagues were smart but I never knew how smart! And not just in their subject – but in mine too! They had such great ideas! It was such a free-flowing exchange. We talked about it everywhere. I realized that I work with some really cool people”!

For Beatrice, this respect led to feelings of trust which she had not experienced in her previous collaboratives. It also led to a sense of increased confidence within her. She felt respected professionally and this was different. She referred to herself as a mentor, rather than a ‘goody two
shoes’: “My younger colleagues actually look up to me and I thought it was just because we were friends, but two of them actually called me their mentor! Imagine! Me! A mentor! I am doing something right!” For Beatrice, this sense of trust deepened her desire to work with her colleagues:

I wish we could do this all the time! It has such value to the children and honestly, for me. It caused me to rethink what I was doing, making it better. I loved the collaboration of my colleagues. I loved getting back to the basics of real teaching! We worked together the most when someone was struggling with something. I know Delilah struggled and we helped her but I struggled as well and not only were the ideas my colleagues gave helpful – they actually rolled up their sleeves and worked with me! It was awesome! You forget, you know? We are all in this together and sometimes you don’t feel that way. It made me see what could happen when collaboration is done right!

It was interesting to note the feeling of satisfaction Beatrice felt at being able to help Delilah and it intensified her thankfulness of others helping her as she understood the satisfaction they derived from the experience: “When you get to go back to the group and hear from your colleagues, you realize we all have things that we thought were going to work and didn’t and things that we thought would never work and did. I just feel like I learned so much more from my friends, not just about the unit we did, but about teaching in general.”

Beatrice felt that she not only had been impacted by the collaborative personally, but that she too had made a difference:

My whole demeanor changed. I thought we were doing this for fun. It was light. We were working together – we were planning together. We wanted the kids to really get something out of learning about the Holocaust. We had a goal and it was the kids. It wasn’t about me and I found myself learning so much - as much as the kids! It was joyous! This is why I became a teacher. This unit made a difference. It was an opportunity for me and instead of
being reactive like we always are here – we were proactive. We had a goal and a plan to work towards that goal. I hope we can do this again!

It was fun speaking to Beatrice and so interesting to note that even the most popular teacher in my study was plagued by self-doubts about the way in which her colleagues viewed her. She came away seemingly lighter and more joyous, and with a demeanor to me, that expressed satisfaction at being respected for her craft.

Charles

Charles has a Bachelor’s in Media Science and is a devout reader, husband and father of five. While his expertise lies in Media Science, he is responsible for various other things at his job including: secular and Judaic mini-units of study on Israeli, American and Jewish holidays; Israel Day parade banners and floats; and all media for school presentations and plays. He is a very gregarious, yet soft-spoken individual.

Charles was very happy to speak with me. His demeanor was pleasant and open and this was my longest discussion. He felt the need to be very detailed about his negative experiences with collaboration in the past:

In the past, collaboration was always done by the principal and it meant your head was on the chopping block. You didn’t do something you were supposed to do or you didn’t do something right so she would pair you up with so-and-so and you would need to learn how to do it better.

His experience in the past had simply been as a resource for materials as they were needed by the teachers for their various units. His definition of collaboration was that of teachers asking for materials and his providing it to them. He did not go into classrooms, nor share in any of the lesson planning. The teachers simply told them what they he needed and he was their resource for it. He was proud of his ability to help, but at the same time expressed frustration:
I have a lot to offer. I am a very educated man and I have often wondered if the teachers included me in the lesson planning – could I make a difference? Could I add to their knowledge about the subject and possible take the lesson in another direction? You know, my brother always tells me that I am a walking encyclopedia. I don’t think anyone here knows that. Then again, I don’t really blame them. There is so much stress on them. They just want to get it done.

He was angry and resentful but found telling me about his experiences very cathartic. He was also pleased about how the collaboration went and was hopeful for the future. It was amazing to me that despite the number of negative experiences in collaboration that were being told to me among the various individuals, they were all so willing to try again in hopes that this time would be different. The teachers proved to be so resilient and wanted so much to impact their students and their colleagues as well.

Charles came to the collaborative with the most experience with collaboration – twenty-five years. Charles displayed feelings of excitement at the idea of not being judged or directed by someone, but instead felt that he was able to freely express his ideas and seemed genuinely surprised that the group considered them to be valuable. He became slightly emotional during our discussion at the idea of being wanted by his peers:

Satisfaction. I helped the students gain a broader perspective and I helped them at all different levels. It was a more broadening educational experience for my students. It also helped the teachers because I can give them different angles on the same view and the students understand a subject better when they see it from multiple perspectives. Even though the teacher is responsible for giving the child what they need to know – they are not responsible by themselves. I can help and I think they saw that.
Charles felt that his peers had gained a greater respect for him and his abilities as a result of the collaboration; that they were able to see the differences that he could make to the lessons of the teachers, as well as to their own depth of knowledge: “I think they saw that I was not just a librarian.” He also felt a sense of inclusion and this led him to a sense of self-satisfaction:

I definitely have a new spring in my step! I feel like they treat me as a teacher now, as a colleague, and not just the library guy. I’m happy to come to work. I have so much to do now! Maybe others would think that was bad but I’m thrilled – I don’t just sit here. I help!”

Charles was so typical of all that I have seen and read in regards to collaboration. He, like the others, wanted to be wanted by his colleagues but his experiences with collaboration were so negative and at times, not even collegial. It was so refreshing to hear person after person recall positive experiences in regards to this collaboration.

Delilah

Delilah is also a highly motivated, very successful individual who has both a Master’s in Reading and Math. She is the Math curriculum coordinator and teaches all of the high Math tracks in the middle school. She is deeply religious and committed to her husband and four small children. She is a very intelligent, straight-forward individual who is direct and to-the-point in conversation.

She was pleasant and chatty and excited to embark on our endeavor. She had in mind what she hoped collaboration would be: “An exchange of ideas? A place where you don’t feel judged or graded and maybe even make some friends?”

Delilah came to the group with twelve years of experience in teaching but no experience with collaboration. She was reluctant and felt that her peers would judge her and evaluate her teaching. She felt that as a current supervisor, it could be detrimental to her status to appear weak in the area of collaboration. Wanting to be a team player, however, she participated and was very surprised:
I liked it! I liked being part of a bigger picture! No one carried the responsibility for being in charge. I really liked that. As head of the math department, I’m always in charge. I’m always to blame. With this project, I wasn’t going at it alone. I felt I had friends and we were in it together. It made me realize just because I’ve done something for five years may not be a reason to keep doing it. When I listened to what my colleagues did with those same kids, I realized there were other ways to do things.

Delilah was the most animated and talkative about her collaborative experience as she had feelings of isolation as a Math teacher previous to the collaborative. These feelings were exacerbated by the fact that she was also a Math supervisor and often came across to her colleagues and “hard and sharp”. She felt that little accommodation should be made to teachers in regards to deadlines and standards, and was worried that her colleagues hated her for that and may not want to work with her; or, that in working with her, it would undermine her role as a supervisor. She felt that math was its own subject and not part of the group. In addition, she felt that her subject was under much greater scrutiny and therefore not subject to being ‘fun’:

As much as I look for projects, there are children who hate them. I found this project. If a child couldn’t shine in the math portion, they could shine with the social studies portion. They felt really good when they were working towards a bigger presentation, and this was ours, and it didn’t look like math! It was SO math! But in a roundabout way. I gained so much! I learned more about my kids – especially the one that has been hard to reach. This project really turned him on! I saw him in such a different light! What a great kid! And Mr. Allen! I’ve worked next to him for 3 years and never knew he was so smart! He had to come in and help me and he and I worked together with the kids and they just got so involved! I wasn’t expecting what I got but I got a lot out of this. It was nice! I saw that I
need to do more and this kind of stuff to reach more kids and connect with more colleagues!

She was the most emotional when I spoke to her in our post-collaborative interview, and at one point, even began to cry. There seemed to be such a sense of relief at not only being “allowed” to participate, but not being “killed” when she made a mistake. Instead, she was overwhelmed by the degree to which her colleagues came to her aid and helped her, along with the students, to remedy the problem. There was such a feeling of satisfaction that emanated from her during the interview at the idea that her colleagues were also her workplace friends:

We were completing our part of the project and I so wanted it to be right; to be the best part of the whole unit, but I was the one who screwed up! I messed up the measurements and ended up misdirecting the kids. They built it wrong. I went back to my colleagues…I thought they were going to kill me because now we had this deadline to make it to the memorial ceremony. And how bad! The department head screws up! They didn’t kill me. In fact, they found me more supplies and helped me to re-do it. They didn’t judge. They knew there was a lot going on in my personal life and they all just pitched in and helped. I felt so loved and supported. I wish we could do more of this!

Trying to pin down or articulate how trust was built is a difficult task but according to Delilah it was a, “Very pleasant surprise. I felt like part of a bigger picture. I was asked for my opinion in everything. I wanted to be a team player.”

This sense of belonging and the help her colleagues afforded her, deepened her sense of trust in them:

I love what I do. I help kids. But sometimes it’s a lonely job. I feel very alone. There is no companionship. Weird, right? I am surrounded by adults doing the same thing as me and yet I have no one to talk to. I think sometimes – are there other teacher struggling with such
an issue? Is this kid bad for everyone? We never have time to talk. This was great. We talked. We did. We struggled together and exchanged ideas and no one criticized anyone else.

These experiences led her to a sense of personal growth and the idea of having the time to share with her colleagues:

I became a better teacher. Usually, Math is not part of a collaborative unit because it is so black and white but I liked being part of a group and it opened my eyes to the students and my colleagues. They were allowed to shine for me in a different way. In particular I had this one student for three years...good student...but I saw him in a different light. He isn’t dry. He has so much to him. It took me to this point to see a different side to this child. Same with Allen! He happened to be free for several of the periods that I was working on this lesson. He came in and kept giving us different ideas. It was an amazing thing! I thought he was just a boring science guy but he has so much personality...so creative. My colleagues liked my idea and let me run with it – even helped me! No one said “Oh that’s lame.” To me, working with these teachers, you become better. I became better. It was amazing what we were able to get done in a relatively short amount of time. But that was the thing – time! I grew as a teacher and a person because I was given the time to talk to my colleagues. We don’t need much. We are pretty smart us teachers. I wish administration would let us talk to each other more.

I really enjoyed watching the metamorphosis that was Delilah in this collaborative. She started reluctantly and with a razor sharp edge to her and she morphed into this sappy, smiling teacher/supervisor who just wanted to be liked but felt that being a supervisor didn’t allow for that. It was such a brilliant example of how collaboratives form and how much benefit they have for those that are in them. It also shows that simply telling people to collaborate may not be enough –
allowing them to choose to collaborate (as well as choose the topic) seemed to really place the onus on the teachers to make it work. Like Delilah, they set out to help the students and ended up helping themselves.

Erica

Erica too is a very successful educator with a Master’s in History. She has successfully contributed to History textbooks and other publications. She is very quiet and contemplative as well as a very innovative and resourceful teacher. Erica’s only experience had been collaboration among her friends:

Its friends exchanging ideas but I’ve only ever really collaborated with my friends. We didn’t tell anyone we were doing it and we didn’t work outside of the two of us. We didn’t want to get in trouble for sharing.

This made Erica fearful of the collaboration. In addition, she had feelings of mistrust and a fear of getting into trouble:

My old principal would actually yell at us if there were two of us together and talking in the hall! We all had a 15 minute break in the afternoon and we used to meet in this one teacher’s room – you know, just to talk shop and chit chat. She got word of that and boy! We were all assigned a duty for that time block. No more talking to each other!

In addition to these feelings, her formal experiences of collaboration took on a quality of being judged and disrespected as a teacher. However, this experience brought about a change:

The expectations of me were always changing. I feel like I am constantly re-writing my curriculum. Standards change and they are confusing; parents complain and I have to change something. You feel stuck. You’re bogged down by paperwork.
Erica was the newest teacher to the school but a veteran teacher. She had three years of collaborative experience in the past and her feelings on collaboration were negative as her experience had been one where collaboration was not encouraged. She felt that this experience was different:

I liked this because we all set a goal together. I knew what was expected of me. Once that was in place, I could easily plan a lesson and work towards our goal. I wasn’t working alone – I had friends and the kids gained so much…they learned so much! So did I! This clear sense of direction and of being included in the process led to trust and a willingness to share:

It gave me a focus. I knew their knowledge from this would go into other classes and so I really wanted them to have a good base. I might have taught the lesson differently if my colleagues hadn’t been counting on me – I might have been lazy. But this provided me with so much more focus. And we were given the time. Time to plan. Time to meet. It got me really excited! It came alive and I think it definitely benefitted the students. It was complete submersion – and it really meant something to them. I learned so much from my colleagues! I really like them! What a great group of talented people.

While Erica was not particularly animated, she did show a clear change of heart when spoke post-collaborative about previous collaborations in regards to this one. In fact, in our final talk together she mentioned to me in confidence that she would be leaving. She told me that the decision came to look elsewhere because she did not feel wanted here. She expressed regret at having made the decision because she said that post-collaborative, she felt very differently. She felt like a member of the staff and like she could make friends. Unfortunately, the decision had already been finalized and she did end up leaving.
The participants in this study shared their attitudes and experiences with their work in collaboration in a faith-based school. From their stories, the researcher has acquired a better understanding of how teachers collaborate. The following section offers a thematic cross-analysis of how the participants in this study experienced a collegial collaborative. The emerging themes from the five interviews revealed the collective understanding of the researcher’s perceptions of collaboration at this institution.

*The Experience of Collaboration as a Culture*

The majority of the teachers in this study had previous experiences in collaboration. These experiences focused on professional development training in collaboration for the purpose of raising student performance. The activities and goals of this association were directed towards raising student performance. As such, collaboration was experienced as a remedial activity that teachers needed to raise their performance in order to acquire greater student success. Such professional development in collaboration was intended to improve their teaching. Professional development targeting collaboration negatively impacted teachers’ perceptions of themselves as practitioners. The teachers noted that this undermined their sense of skill, knowledge, and agency. Teacher collaboration held negative meaning.

Discussions surrounding collaboration led to obvious conversations about training in collaboration. When asked about professional development training in collaboration, the teachers expressed dissatisfaction.
Charles commented,

We drive these long distances to listen to these so-called ‘experts’ and really, you just come away feeling badly about yourself. They make it seem effortless, I always feel like I am doing something wrong.

Erica stated,

I HATE professional development. What does that even mean? We go to these places so far away and we sit all day listening to these gurus in education and I think to myself, ‘There are a million workshops going on here. I would not have picked this one for myself so why did my boss put me here? Was she trying to tell me something? Was I blind to what I apparently sucked at?

The meaning of these activities did not allow for professional growth. Allen spoke about it,

We have people come in or we drive hours to hear someone and it’s meant to help us grow as teachers and be better at what we do but you know what? It stinks. I actually leave feeling bad about myself because I think Wow! This is a great teacher and her ideas are so good and how the hell does she have the time to be so good? And who at her school helps? And when can I get a job there?

Charles too commented,

Collaborations were always done by the principal and it meant your head was on the chopping block. You didn’t do something you were supposed to do or you didn’t do something right so she would pair you up with so-and-so and you would need to learn how to do it better.
Prior negative experiences with professional development in collaboration did not connect with actual participant experiences where teachers had experienced collaboration as an informal, voluntary activity, not supported by administration. Erica captured this sentiment,

It happened because I was friends with the teacher I was working with. We happened to have classrooms next to each other that year but we had been friends prior to that. We would just come up with ideas together. We would even switch classes sometimes. We were able to do that. You know, we could go in and teach the other’s class. We definitely collaborated on ideas, on curriculum. So, it was a nice experience but it was really just because we were friends. We didn’t tell anybody – not the principal, not our colleagues.

Since the predominant culture of teaching is embedded in isolation (Robbins & Alvy 2003), the need to share was clearly a challenge for teachers. Allen commented that the environment of collegiality among the staff was one of, “Don’t play in my pool” in terms of collaboration. While Allen wanted to participate collaboratively with grade-level teachers, he felt resistance and an, “Inability to show them what I could really do. I ended up just being the resource for old manuals and cool gadgets – not really in on the ground floor of student learning.” Additionally, Allen would always try to talk to his colleagues in the hall, often without response. I overheard Allen one day talking in his classroom prior to the collaboration having started, and I popped my head into his room as I passed. I looked around the room and seeing no one, asked him who he was speaking to. He told me that there had been someone there and he guessed they had left. He continued to tell me that it happened all the time as he could be awkward in conversation. He remarked that even growing up with a sister he was a loner because people didn’t ‘get him’. He said that he preferred it that way and often made good conversation with himself. In fact, he remarked that it was why he
went into teaching – students wouldn’t be so judgmental and he could work alone just pouring science into them. It was all of the other ‘stuff’ that he hated.

Such previous experiences were reexamined as the process of creating a collaborative to build a curriculum unfolded. The convergence of feelings from the past provided a focus on how the participants experienced the collaborative. Working together was not representative of traditional teaching experience. In fact, the traditional teaching experience had been collaborative teams built by administrators to focus on a specific teaching task. The goal of the administrators was improved student achievement. It was something very different for these teachers. For them, the experience of building a product to teach to their students was meaningful. Even more meaningful however, was that in the building of the unit they began to rely on one another for advice and support. They became a team and it was through their efforts as a team that their definition of collaboration morphed from one of something forced to that of something fun.

Erica stated,

It’s nice to have a sense of support and to have feedback on what you are doing because usually the classroom is very isolating. You can get feedback from the students, but it’s nice to have a peer give you feedback and, you know, you get ideas when you are stuck on something I liked this because we all set a goal together. I knew what was expected of me. Once that was in place, I could easily plan a lesson and work towards our goal. I wasn’t working alone. I had friends and the kids gained so much. They learned so much. So did I. I learned so much from my colleagues. I really like them! What a great group of talented people.
Delilah too commented,

    The way this was is we kind of took a project, and we worked on it and it was collaborative, and it was beautiful.

And finally, Beatrice said

    We are all in this together and sometimes you don’t feel that way. It made me see what could happen when collaboration is done right. When its real collaboration and not – go fix this.

    They gained from working together in many ways. It became more than just collaboration for the lesson. It morphed into a culture where collaboration was pervasive. There was one occasion I observed where Charles was walking through the hallways with a very large bag. As he passed me he told me that he had been at the flea market that weekend and had ‘picked up a few things’. A short time later, I walked into Beatrice’s room and noticed an enormous stack of books on the desk. I made mention of the fact that she must be an avid reader when she enthusiastically informed me that they had all been gifts from Charles. “Can you imagine?”, she said, “he thought of me while at a flea market this weekend and knew these books would be used by me to teach the students about this unit. He must have spent a fortune! I offered to pay him but he refused. Imagine! Someone including me in his thoughts on the weekend!” This sentiment was indicative of how collaborations from a teachers perspective are formed, and it led to the realization that the teachers believed collaboration required specific cultural qualities and involved several components: inclusion, trust, respect, and shared leadership.

A Culture of Inclusion and Trust

    When examining the need to build a culture of collaboration, the teachers noted the importance of feeling included in the group. Trust was viewed as an important ingredient to these
feelings of inclusion. The development and maintenance of a collaborative relationship allowed for feelings of trust both in themselves and their colleagues. The degree to which their colleagues were non-judgmental and supportive allowed the relationships to flourish. These relationships allowed for the active participation of the group members that led to feelings of acceptance and further encouraged their symbiotic relationships. It opened up space for vulnerability and risk-taking which in turn, developed a sense of trust which led to feelings of inclusion.

They were allowed to express their feelings and felt acceptance of themselves and one another.

Delilah commented,

I became a better teacher. Usually, math is not part of a collaborative unit because it is so black and white but I liked being part of a group and it opened my eyes to the students and my colleagues and even myself! They were allowed to shine for me in a different way and I think I shined for them in a different way too. It was an amazing thing! My colleagues liked my idea and let me run with it – even helped me! No one said “Oh that’s lame.” To me, working with these teachers, you become better. I became better. I’m really glad that I was included in this group.

While Allen remarked,

No one was territorial! Everyone shared everything and I was really included – not just my stuff. And guess what? They gave it all back! Dumb I know, but it shows respect. They value my things now as much as I do.

An understanding emerged that the motivation they felt to do more via the collaborative was a result of inclusion and trust. They saw the process as reciprocal and evolving and that they benefitted directly from working with one another. It added meaning and value to their work.

Beatrice was candid stating,
The more I learned, the more I saw the kids learning. The more excited I became, the more the kids were excited! It caused me to rethink what I was doing, making it better. I kept going back to my colleagues and we just kept the conversations going. Everyone helped with everything. No one was left out! Even me!

The feelings of inclusion acted as a catalyst to inquiry. Exchanges surrounding inquiry led to discovery. Beatrice commented to this:

When you get to go back to the group and hear from your colleagues, you realize we all have things that we thought were going to work and didn’t and things that we thought would never work and did. I just feel like I learned so much more from my friends, not just about the unit we did, but about teaching in general. We had to do this. There was a deadline. But when we worked together we did it so much better!

As a result of participating in this collaborative, thoughts and ideas were shared freely and a unit of study was developed for a group of students. The more the teachers shared, the more their trust in one another grew. This led to feelings of inclusion in the group. All of the teachers played an equal role in the development and execution of the unit. They benefitted mutually not only from the experience itself, but from one another. As they began to feel included in the group they wanted to continue working with the group. As tasks were assigned and lessons were constructed, each teacher did not want to ‘disappoint’ the others. Through these conversations and interactions their trust in one another grew. Crossed arms and closed mouths were replaced with laughter and free exchanges; mugs of coffee were brought to the meetings and conversations were being held outside of meeting time in teacher’s rooms. On one particular day, the group came in with flowers, cake and balloons. As they marched down the hall laughing, I asked why the celebration? They answered that it was Delilah’s birthday and they felt the need to celebrate. I inquired as to whether
or not this had ever happened before and was told that in fact it had not. When I further inquired as to why now, the general consensus was that now they had a reason to celebrate - they were a team!

In my observations of hallway and lunchroom discussions, I was again taken aback at the change in attitude among these teachers. They sat together; they ate together; they worked together. A few of them called one another after work just to talk. They seemed somehow, lighter. Their demeanor had changed. Their attitudes had shifted. Instead of the usual morning routine of walking in and complaining about the weather or upcoming meetings, there was discussion of weekend activities. There were unprompted questions like – *How did the wedding go? How was the ride to that soccer tournament?* They were the conversations of colleagues. They seemed excited to be at work. This trust and sense of inclusion led to shared leadership.

*A Culture of Shared Leadership*

Trust and inclusion led to the realization that the shared leadership the teachers felt came as a result of the trust they had in their colleagues. This, coupled with the feelings of inclusion and trust, led to no one being ‘in charge’, but instead, sharing the leadership roles in order for the project to be completed successfully.

Not one member of the group appeared to have a need, or a desire, to be in control. They came together to train one another and learn from each other and hence, developed a sense of shared leadership. A perception of teacher ownership in the formation of the collaborative relationships served to promote teacher satisfaction with the experience among the participants. Charles found this to be the case,

*I felt like part of a bigger picture. The whole unit was so hands-on. And even though we had some junior administrators in our group (department heads), no one person was the*
‘boss’. Everyone shared their strategies and their ideas…what works for them, and the other teachers had an opportunity to learn about different strategies they may not have been aware of or may not have used. I realized it’s okay not to know everything. No one was expecting me to. In the end, we all had our specialties and that guided us but we talked about what we needed to talk about and helped each other. Everyone was in charge and no one was in charge.

Delilah commented,

No one carried the responsibility for being in charge. I really liked that. As head of the math department, I’m always in charge. I’m always to blame. With this project, I wasn’t going at it alone. I felt I had friends and we were in it together. In fact, I was the one who screwed up! I messed up the measurements and ended up misdirecting the kids. They built it wrong. I went back to my colleagues…I thought they were going to kill me because now we had this deadline to make it onto a memorial ceremony. And how bad! The department head screws up! They didn’t kill me. In fact, they found me more supplies and helped me to re-do it. They didn’t judge. They knew there was a lot going on in my personal life and they all just pitched in and helped. I felt so loved and supported. I wish we could do more of this!”

Additionally, Beatrice commented,

I felt like part of a bigger picture. The whole unit was so hands-on. And even though we had some junior administrators in our group (department heads), no one person was the ‘boss’. Everyone shared their strategies and their ideas…what works for them, and the other teachers had an opportunity to learn about different strategies they may not have been
aware of or may not have used. I realized it’s okay not to know everything. No one was expecting me to. In the end, we all had our specialties and that guided us but we talked about what we needed to talk about and helped each other. Everyone was in charge and no one was in charge.

The shared responsibility of leadership galvanized them as a group with a focus on student learning. It was articulated by Allen who felt this method of collaboration provided an outlet for him to share instrumental ideas and gain knowledge by listening to the expertise of his colleagues: “This collaboration brought different teachers together in various ways. We built a community of learners in order to fulfill a goal. I hope it continues.” The desire to share leadership responsibilities increased as the teachers felt included in the collaborative synergy of the group.

Beatrice noted this,

My colleagues are so intelligent. I knew but I didn’t know. Allen, for example, so, so smart and really wants us to talk to him and let him share his ideas. And Charles! Wow! I had no idea he had such a vast amount of knowledge and ideas and was so willing to help!

Erica also commented,

I was so impressed by Delilah. I thought she was just a Math administrator. Well, not JUST a math administrator – you know what I mean. Another boss. I figured she would want control – be in charge. But she came to the table as a teacher. She’s a teacher too! She has amazing ideas for language arts and social studies as well! She has so much also in the way of materials that she was more than willing – in fact, eager to share!
Participating in this collaborative provided a meaningful sense of empowerment through shared leadership that focused directly on student learning. By focusing on the teacher’s responsibility for student learning, a culture of collaboration grew. As each teacher contributed, they were viewed for the strengths they brought to the collaborative. More importantly, as each teacher felt a sense of inclusion, trust, and shared leadership, they began to willingly speak about their areas of weakness as they looked to their colleagues for advice and support. Each teacher was allowed to develop their areas of weakness without feeling judged. They developed a sense of shared leadership and began not only to exchange lesson ideas, but suggestions for behaviorally challenged students. They began sharing supplies and spaces. As I observed them all working together, I noted the happy way in which they spoke to one another in the hallways; the ways in which they would steal into each other’s classrooms at breaks just to talk; the gifts of cups of coffee and cookies and even hugs. As their trust grew and they felt more included in the group, they shared their leadership responsibilities. As each individual teacher was invested with responsibilities in an egalitarian structure, they were allowed to develop and deepen respect for one another. They were becoming a community. And it was catching on. On one occasion I observed a 7th grade teacher walking in with trays full of coffees. I asked her where the party was and she told me excitedly – Delilah’s room. When I inquired as to the reason, she let me know that she had noticed the 8th grade teachers in there every afternoon having coffee and talking about work, school, home. She came in one day and asked for some professional advice. Not only did they invite her to sit and talk, they all weighed in and helped her find a solution. So, she began attending regularly. “Well”, she said, “A couple of my bosses are in that group and every time I walk in there they just treat me like a friend. They have treated me every time to my favorite coffee and if I’m not there that day, they walk it to my room! I insisted on treating today. They are my friends. Really, they are my mentors. They never make me feel like an underling – just a person. I want to
be like that if I’m ever a leader. I want to be a friend and make people comfortable enough to just come in and talk. They make working here really nice.” This attitude, as reflected by a teacher who was not participating in the study was the epitome of the importance of shared leadership; of making everyone feel as if they have a place and a say and a feeling of importance – ‘boss’ or not.

This sense of shared leadership was clearly an important aspect of the culture of collaboration. The inclusion and trust the teachers felt built a community of leaders sharing the responsibility for teaching the unit. From this, respect for one another grew and deepened.

*A Culture of Respect*

Inclusion and trust, coupled with the feelings of shared leadership in their colleagues furthered the respect they developed for both their colleagues and the collaboration itself.

The sense of mutual respect was a salient aspect of this cultural environment. The spirit of camaraderie in a culture of collaboration led to a heightened sense of mutual respect. In collaboration, equal partners work together to move things forward. The collaboration prompted participants to share their expertise. Allen noted these feelings, “I was not afraid to speak up – to offer my ideas. I felt valued by the group and as they saw what I could do, I think they valued me more – maybe even liked me!” While Beatrice felt, “I always respected my colleagues as co-workers. I came to see them differently in this project. Now I respect them as my friends.”

Charles also commented,

No one really truly respected me here. Not as a teacher. I was the librarian. I had resources. Worst of all, if they needed coverage for a teacher it was me. I was a babysitter. What we did here together - this made me part of the team. They needed my knowledge and
expertise. They needed me. I could see in their eyes that they really came to respect how smart I was – maybe even valuable to them. Now, they run ideas by me. They ask for my help in advance. Now we have library periods and I teach a separate unit of study to the kids and its valued. Now I’m respected as a teacher.

Despite previous assumptions regarding the meaning and value of collaboration, the essence of this experience did not focus on the need to reform or remediate their teaching. Rather, a collaborative culture was formed by exchanging thoughts and ideas as to how to best teach their students. The feelings of inclusion felt by the teachers in building the unit led to the sharing of leadership. The shared leadership among all of the participants increased their sense of ownership in the unit and enriched their collaborative experience. As they worked together on the unit, their respect for one another increased. They sought input on everything from their colleagues and they all helped one another in every facet of the unit as the leadership was shared. This changed not only their negative perceptions of collaboration but the culture of the collaboration itself. In one of the planning meetings the team was stuck on one particular issue relating to teaching the science aspect of the unit. The fear was that the lessons relating to the Holocaust and science might be too much for the children. At one point, Erica turned to Beatrice and asked her why she hadn’t spoken yet because it looked like she had an idea. Beatrice had informed her that she did but that she was reluctant to share because Allen was really the scientist in the room and she was the artsy one to which Delilah responded: “The only thing that would be silly is for you not to share. You are a respected teacher in this room and while you’re not a scientist the students adore you. You know how to get to them. If you can somehow add a way for Allen to make an emotional connection for them to the Holocaust and make it meaningful for them in that brilliant way you have, then you MUST share it!” This sense of respect and camaraderie was shared by everyone. Each teacher in
the group was not judged on their ability to teach standards but on their ability to teach and connect. Each teacher was respected for their individual qualities and this mutual respect was incredible to witness. The inclusion, shared leadership, trust, and respect each teacher felt as they journeyed through their experience built a culture that only further enhanced these qualities. This collaboration built a culture that was cyclical. The product of this cycle led to the professional growth of each teacher.

The Experience of Collaboration in Promoting Professional Growth

A product of the establishment and support of a collaborative culture gave rise to professional growth. The irony however, was that the teachers in this study were building a collaborative with the students in mind. The collaboration was never intended as a forum for professional development. And yet professional development occurred as each teacher noted professional growth throughout the duration of the collaboration. Their sense of professional growth came directly from the feedback they received from their colleagues as to their participation in the collaborative. This took the form of compliments, advice offered and taken, and simply lending a hand to each other in order to help things progress.

Charles commented,

I never learned what I wanted to learn. I never felt like I was growing as a teacher. I was just fixing all of my mess-ups. But this unit we did together – this unit showed me that all these other training things we do for collaboration are sh-t. They aren’t real. This-what we did- this was real. We don’t need to be trained on how to collaborate, we just need time to work together as a team. This. This helped me grow. This helped me feel good about myself. This showed me that I am doing it right because my colleagues said I was!
What aided them in their professional growth was a resurgence of the reasons why they became teachers and that was to make a difference in the lives of their students. All of the teachers felt that the strict adherence to standards and remediation in mandated, past professional development stifled their creativity which disabled them from growing as teachers. They expressed feelings of discontent with their work and an inability to affect change in the lives of their students. Charles expressed it as feeling “stuck in neutral.” Delilah noted feelings of, “Doing the same thing day after day and year after year. I feel kinda stuck.” Erica commented,

The expectations of me are always changing. I feel like I am constantly re-writing my curriculum. Standards change and they are confusing; parents complain and I have to change something. You feel stuck. I don’t really make a difference here. I feel like a robot.”

These feelings of ‘being stuck’ were evidence to that fact that all of the participants felt a lack of professional growth. While they wanted to work to make a difference in the lives of their students, the opportunities for professional development did not make a difference in the professional growth of their craft. They attributed this lack of professional growth and feelings of inadequacy to the lack of time needed to work together. In the first meeting, there was a sense of nervousness and anxiety and when asked about it, the response was that they (the teachers) wanted this collaborative project to work but they were worried about having the time to adequately complete it. They resigned themselves to just ‘doing their best’ and finding the time where they could. As they worked together however, and became excited about the project, they found the time: during breaks, after school and even on the phone together in the evenings. While time was a mitigating factor to their success and important concern to the teachers, it carried less weight as they continued to build the collaborative; they became invested in it and found the time they needed to make it a success.
This theme of professional growth differentiates this study from previous studies targeted to examine the effect of collaboration on student achievement. The theme of professional growth revealed several elements that identified an important shared sense of making a difference and the importance of teamwork as being of great significance in creating a culture of collaboration.

Reciprocity that developed from trust and inclusion further enhanced collegial inquiry; the more the teachers learned and saw the students learning, the more they wanted to learn and have their students continue learning. They sensed clear value in this engagement as has been seen by Leonard & Leonard (2003), who noted that a known benefit of collaboration lies in the concept of pooled intelligence. This concept is founded upon the premise that collaboration prompted all participants to share their expertise, thus increasing the knowledge and skill of all members of the group and enhancing the feelings of inclusion.

The Meaning of Professional Growth

A shared motivation for entering the practice of teaching was seen as making a difference. This motivator has been explored by Deci and Ryan (2002) who found teachers enter the profession to make a difference in the lives of children. This drives them in their work and from this they develop feelings of joy and a sense of accomplishment. Their desire to make a difference and to place the needs of their students first was noted by Allen,

I worked in many different places contributing to science articles and periodicals and even constructing labs for kids in places like Liberty Science Center and I was happy. It was fun. But I never saw the kids again. It was one time and good-bye. Did I make a difference? Did I help them to love science? But then I found this job and it’s such a difference! Many of the kids don’t really get me but the ones that do, I really make a difference! They love
science as much as I do and they don’t think I’m the weird science guy – they think I’m cool! It’s me who nurtured their love of science! I motivated them! It means something, you know?

Erica captured this as well,

I love what I do. I make no money but I love what I do. Some things mean more than money. I made good money before this but I wasn’t happy. It felt like what I did didn’t matter. Don’t get me wrong – I like money and this is hard work but it means something and when you can mean something to a child. It means more than money.

All of the teachers noted that they went into teaching for the purpose of affecting student’s lives. Beatrice noted,

It never ceases to amaze me. I’ve worked in many districts and every kid needs a good teacher. You think, “Oh they have money” or “Oh they have great parents” and yet every time I’m surprised. Surprised that the rich kid needs love and attention that his parents fail to give him on a regular basis; or that it’s the maid that raising him. Surprised that the kids with the great parents have issues that they deal with and think their parents are supposed to think they are wonderful kids, and yet they don’t feel so wonderful. Black, white, Asian, purple, Christian, Jewish, Muslim – I don’t care. A kid is a kid is a kid and I am here to teach them and mentor them and make a difference and I never assume that they don’t need me to do that. We can’t forget that. We came to make a difference and we need to be sure that we do!

Teaching with the purpose of making a difference permeated the motivation to enter the teaching profession. Despite the obstacles of time, professional development for remediation, and
constantly changing standards, they knew they were giving of themselves to their students. What they also noted however, was they did not feel as if they were gaining as professionals.

Beatrice commented as to these feelings,

I had this one young lady and I noticed that she seemed so unhappy –just not right. Well, when I caught her in a candid moment she told me of the absolutely awful divorce her parents were going through and how worried she was for the well-being of her younger siblings. I mentored her through it and today she is a shining example of success at NYU. She came back to thank me and told me that I was instrumental in her growth. I was beyond flattered but it also got me thinking: Was there anyone like me out there for me? We are so into our jobs and these kids and being here for them in whatever way they need us, but who has our back? Who makes sure we as teachers are ok? Who makes sure we are successful? I don’t know the answer to that.

Sharing this purpose of making a difference allowed for the ability to relate to one another and feel connected to this common purpose. They discussed the importance of support from their peers in their daily interactions. Delilah noted,

I love what I do. I help kids. But sometimes it’s a lonely job. I feel very alone. There is no companionship. Weird, right? I am surrounded by adults doing the same thing as me and yet I have no one to talk to. I think sometimes – are there other teacher struggling with such-and such issue? Is this kid bad for everyone? Can anyone relate to what I am going through or am I a bad teacher?
The belief in making a difference related to how they have grown in instructional practice and expertise. They described instructional changes that developed as a result of professional collaboration, as well as the specific strategies that related to a content area or a specific skill. This expansion of instructional repertoire was noted by Charles,

I learned I can do so much more! I actually have a professional relationship with my colleagues. They are really my colleagues! I thought that that just meant they were the people you worked with but it’s more than that. It’s a work friend – someone who gets it.

The reason that compels teachers to enter the profession remains a necessary element in their ongoing professional growth. The need to make a difference in students’ lives continues to provide a sense of purpose that when shared in a collaborative, also serves to allow for individuals to feel related in this belief. As a result, they come together and share instructional strategies and enhance their professional expertise. This sharing of instructional strategies enhances professional expertise because the participants are working together to create a learning environment for their students that makes a difference. This serves to connect to fundamental meaning that drove these individuals to the calling of teaching. It also connects to sharing this intrinsic meaning with one another. This further enhances the culture of collaboration that leads to a sense of teamwork. Teamwork involves the inclusion, trust, and respect these teachers each had for each other. And while this professional growth did not take much time, time was a necessary element as they need to be provided with opportunities to talk with one another and share things. As the collaborative grew and their sense of teamwork strengthened, time was found to complete the tasks they felt were necessary to make the collaborative a success.

Feelings of frustration at the lack of time to work together in the past were expressed by all. The importance of time for collaboration is well noted in the research. Darling-Hammond (1999)
addressed the issue of time afforded to collaboration in American public schools, finding that the
time provided teachers for collaborative efforts and the establishment of collective learning
communities is significantly less than that given teachers in other industrialized nations. The
teachers in this study saw their previous experiences with time as an inhibitor to professional
growth.

Allen stated,

    Usually we just meet to meet. And we meet so much here that we never have time to do
    anything but meet. We meet to talk about test scores and standards and when we meet one
    person talks and everyone else is having these sidebar conversations. We never meet to plan
    anything. I loved that we met to plan something – not just talk. We actually DID something.

Delilah noted,

    I love when we meet as a group of teachers. We cover so much and it’s so important and
    quite frankly, sometimes we just need to talk. But you would think it was asking
    administration to fly us to the moon to give us the time we need to talk with one another.
    This was nice because we could talk it out. There was no pressure of a deadline, which was
    helpful but more helpful was the fact that we just got to sit and chat and no one was rushing
    to class or late to class or needing to be somewhere. We were given an amount of time and
    we started on time and we worked the entire time. We don’t need that much but we can’t
    have nothing!
Similarly, Erica observed,

I wish we had this more often. Wanna do another study?? Seriously though, we schedule meetings – they never start on time and so then they never end on time and then I’m rushed and late to class and it’s just wasteful because I’m sitting there stressed the whole time and don’t actually pay attention. These meetings were set. We started on time and we ended on time because we knew in advance the time we had to work in. And we had time – PERIOD. It was so awesome!

For this study, the use of time had a different value by providing feedback on their work. Time was set aside not only to plan the unit but to discuss results along the way.

Charles concluded,

They weren’t just meetings to discuss goals. The meetings were the goal! We planned and talked and laid things out and figured things out. I’m usually just a reference. I’m not seen as a ‘real’ teacher. I was asked to help figure things out on this. I was able to not only give the teachers resources, but ideas. They realized how much I had to offer and I was even invited in to tell the kids about how my grandmother survived the Holocaust; how she was rescued. I think the students gained so much from that. I think it was a broader perspective. The teachers gained too. I wasn’t the supplemental teacher. I piqued their interests and I think my colleagues found me useful. I also learned how much work it is to teach! I think the difference here was time. I don’t think the teacher doesn’t want to talk to me – I think there is no time to.
Delilah noted similar feelings,

It was amazing what we were able to get done in a relatively short amount of time. But that was the thing – time! I grew as a teacher and a person because I was given the time to talk to my colleagues. We don’t need much. We are pretty smart us teachers. I wish administration would just let us talk to each other more and stop talking at us!

One of the main requirements of collaboration that results in professional growth was the provision and use of time. Time was seen as a necessary element to growth. The reason they noted professional was that they were given the time to work to create a meaningful product as a team. Erica commented,

The time to work together was so important and in working as a group together we were able to plan a really great unit!

Beatrice noted,

We meet every month in whatever ‘team’ we have been placed into. The math team; the social studies team; the 4th grade team, etc… And the leader of the team (the curriculum coordinator) talks and we all listen but we are not a team. We are a group of people teaching the same subject but we all teach it to different grade levels. This unit really was a team. We were the 8th grade team teaching the 8th grade about the Holocaust. We each taught our specific subjects to be sure, but we integrated them. More importantly, we talked about the 8th grade students. We shared ideas and thoughts and yes, even some small talk. It really was a team – not what this school calls a team.
Time was used to work together collaboratively on the unit. They developed common lessons, shared ideas, reflected upon strategies they used in the classrooms and discussed learning objectives. Delilah described her view on the time given for collegiality and collaboration, and the effect it had on her sense of making a difference:

It was positive and encouraging. It made me feel like part of a team and so many times we are alone in our rooms and we don’t have any idea what is going on around us. This really encouraged community. I knew I could talk to my colleagues and there was no judgment – just advice.

The importance of shared strategies and ideas as well as lesson plan development, provided conversations about the students and the strategies involved in teaching them as individuals. They felt secure and confident in their ability to teach their subjects and grew in confidence when it came to each individual student and the nuances of teaching some of the more challenging ones. These feelings of confidence came as a direct result of their teamwork. Beatrice remarked,

There was this one kid. I could not get through to him and honestly, I didn’t like him. Probably because he was a mark of my failure – I couldn’t reach him. Because of my colleagues and the time we had to talk about the kids, I learned more about him. He was allowed to shine for me in a different way. He had been my student for three years…good student…but I saw him in a different light. He isn’t dry. He has so much to him. It took me to this point, and with these people, to see a different side to this child. Now I really like him!
The belief that this collaborative experience was successful included the use of time to come together as a team that planned and worked together. Teamwork was seen as a necessary element of professional growth. Erica commented,

I liked this because we all set a goal together. I knew what was expected of me. Once that was in place, I could easily plan a lesson and work towards our goal. I wasn’t working alone – I had friends and the kids gained so much…they learned so much! So did I!

Similarly, Beatrice noted,

By working with this team, my whole demeanor changed. I thought we were doing this for fun. It was light. We were working together – we were planning together. We wanted the kids to really get something out of learning about the Holocaust. We had a goal and it was the kids. It wasn’t about me and, yet I found myself learning so much – as much as the kids! It was joyous! This is why I became a teacher. This unit made a difference.

The establishment of a collaborative culture served to return teachers to the intrinsic meaning of why they entered the profession. Their belief was that they could make a difference in the lives of children. The teachers felt that showing students how much they cared for them – both emotionally and educationally – fueled growth in their students. It also provided their students with confidence and interest in their learning. They felt that they as teachers made a difference by caring about the child as a whole and facilitating personal transformation within each student. Beatrice embodied this in her comment,

We’re not just teachers – we’re like their moms at school. I actually tell them and their parents – “I’m your mom at school”. I’m not just here to teach my subject. I’m here to inspire a passion for learning. I don’t have to be their favorite teacher – I want to be the one...
that inspires them to learn; that sparks that interest in doing more. But I can’t just look at them through the eyes of my subject. They have homes and families and problems and I need to be here for them in whatever capacity I can because that’s why I teach! I want to make a difference. We all do! This unit – the way we did it – we all grew as a team. We all saw these kids differently because we talked about them together. We saw each other differently. Hell! I saw myself differently and you know what? For the first time in a long time, I liked what I saw!

The motivation to teach and make a difference was now seen to connect to the need for teamwork. They saw the need for time to work within that collaborative team in order to make a difference. This motivation was no longer conceived in isolation. By creating and reviewing their work together, they grew as individuals professionally.

This growth remains a necessary element in their ability to thrive as teachers. Creative collaboration brought feelings of growth and change to all of the teachers. The time to work and grow from the exchange of ideas and the analysis of feedback allowed for the resurgence of the feelings that made them become teachers – the need to make a difference. By refocusing on the meaning of what could be accomplished as a teacher, they were motivated to pursue their own professional growth. The time they were given to work as a collaborative team served to eliminate the feelings of an isolated work environment. The collaborative culture provided a safe environment within which to grow and make a difference. These feelings of safety and acceptance enabled the teachers to grow professionally and become a collaborative team. What they also found however, was they grew close to their colleagues and established friendships. Because of these friendships, they made the time to talk to one another. In addition to the planning meetings, they met every afternoon during their common break. More importantly, they met after work. When
discussing plans in a meeting it came to my attention that Erica and Delilah had formulated a plan for a piece of the lesson. They discussed it openly at the meeting and mentioned that they came up with it while cooking dinner together. When I asked what they meant, they told me that there several night a week that they called each other after work to talk shop and ‘other stuff’ and cook dinner over the phone. It was then that I found out that Allen and Charles had also been to the flea market together scavenging for books and ‘cool gadgets’. I found this to truly be an exemplar of the importance of time as related to becoming a collaborative team. They needed very little and it simply served as a catalyst to begin the discussions. Then, in their dedication and enthusiasm, they made the time outside of work because they were gaining both individually and as a group. This collaborative environment and the new-found professional friendships renewed their personal growth as individuals beyond that of the collaborative team.

The Belief That Collaboration Provides Personal Growth

A renewed understanding of personal growth, beyond professional growth, was embedded in the meaning of participation in this collaborative experience. Prior interactions with one another were stifled resulting in feelings of loneliness and isolation. Teaching, by nature, is a social career. Frustration from the lack of personal relationships with colleagues was evident.

Beatrice commented,

I remember when I was little; the teachers would be standing in the hall with their cups of coffee and just talking. I remember being so excited at the idea of becoming a teacher AND having friends to talk to about work right there at work! There isn’t that anymore. It’s just work, work, and work. I feel very alone. I’m trapped all day with kids and then go home to my own kids. I don’t even know if I’m good at any of it really. I have no time for friends. I
thought I would have more work friends but there is no time for that. Like I said – just work-work-work.

In this collaborative, a sense of learning came directly from the feedback they received from their colleagues. Their colleagues motivated them and re-ignited a sense of accountability for both their students’ learning and their own learning as well. They felt that a motivational factor behind their interactions lay in its direct connection to the everyday work they must do. As they engaged in the collaboration, they listened to their colleagues and were forced to formulate responses that required them to articulate their instructional purpose, the expected outcome, and reflect upon how closely their results matched their intentions. This collaborative facilitated the process of collegial relationship building by serving as a forcing function for interaction. The interactive dialogue the participants experienced expanded the expertise of each individual, utilizing the pooled experiences of multiple people. The feedback from their colleagues helped them establish clear goals and expectations, thereby making the unit a success. But the collegial relationships did something else - they opened the doors for personal interactions. The discussions began to include personal conversation as well as professional ones. ‘Talking shop’ became just talking.

Delilah captured this in her interview,

Everyone on the team knew what was going on in my personal life. Why? Because I shared it. And you know what was weird? I didn’t share in the past because I didn’t want people to think I was making up excuses. There is so much pressure when you are a teacher. I shared it because I wanted to; because I needed someone to talk to. I had them. Right here in my own school, I had them. That was so nice. It made me realize that I could be a person here; that it wasn’t just a job I had to do. And don’t get me wrong – I definitely grew as a teacher.
but I grew as a person too and my sharing led to other people in the group sharing and we became so much more than a team – we became a family.

Their professional growth as teachers directly impacted their personal growth. They loved what was gained for them professionally but were also surprised at what they gained personally. Delilah further noted,

With this project, I wasn’t going at it alone. I felt I had friends and we were in it together. In fact, I was the one who screwed up! I messed up the measurements and ended up misdirecting the kids. They built it wrong. I went back to my colleagues…I thought they were going to kill me because now we had this deadline to make it onto a memorial ceremony. And how bad! The department head screws up! They didn’t kill me. In fact, they found me more supplies and helped me to re-do it. They didn’t judge. Through all of this, there was a lot going on in my personal life. They knew that. They all just pitched in and helped. I felt so loved and supported. I realized that I don’t have to be perfect – that I work with a group of teachers that care. I wish we could do more of this!

Similarly, Charles commented,

Once they realized what I was really capable of and they respected me more, they came in for ideas for lessons and for more information. But you know what else they came in for? Just to say hi. I suddenly had people to show the pictures of my granddaughter to! Beatrice came in every day to share a joke and look at my picture and Allen came in just to talk to me about the cool things he found at the flea market in terms of gadgets and I shared with him my book finds. I really like that. I don’t feel like the outsider. I used to think people thought I was weird so I didn’t share stuff. Really, they were just reluctant to share and
didn’t really have the time. It’s nice because now they make the time. We’re friends. That’s what friends do.

The professional growth they experienced through this collaborative enabled personal development. In turn, a comfort level was established and personal growth was gained. The teachers felt inspired and invigorated to teach. They felt like they were part of a team. They were viewed as professional and contributors to the group and these feelings helped them grow personally. They re-established themselves as professionals and in turn, established friendships and a sense of community that fostered personal growth.

This unit brought feelings of personal growth to all of the teachers. The respect and trust that developed by way of the collaborative enhanced their feelings of inclusion and shared leadership. The time to work and become a collaborative team allowed for the resurgence of the feelings that made them become teachers – the need to make a difference and gain a sense of a job well done. All of the teachers shared that they had grown as individuals on a personal level and noted feelings of satisfaction at the idea of having ‘work friends’ and people to share things with. These feelings enhanced the culture of collaboration and allowed for the growth of each participant through mutual respect and a sense of worth. Feelings of personal satisfaction and even joy in the entire process of this collaboration emerged from all of the teacher interviews. The quiet classroom chats; the hallway chatter; the impromptu birthday parties; the cups of coffee; the hugs exchanged, all led to a growth among all of the participants both as a group professionally and personally. It also led to the personal growth of each member of the group as they came to work with the realization that they were respected, trusted and valued. They were also loved.

When I set out to embark on this research, I had a very strong suspicion that the experience of the teachers in a creative collaborative would be meaningful. I hoped to find that a sense of
inclusion and the respect and trust that was built among them as a result of this inclusion would re-invigorate for them the true meaning of collaboration. I expected that given time, they would form a collaborative team. I also expected that they would grow professionally as a result of the collaboration. What I did not expect was how much each teacher grew personally. I was not expecting how much they related to wanting to make a difference and that once they felt that they were making a difference, they moved beyond professional needs to address needs that were more personal in nature. They also grew personally from the professional development they experienced in undertaking this creative collaborative. As their enthusiasm heightened they began to talk… and talk… and talk. They met during work and after work. They called each other on the phone. They celebrated with one another and even cried with one another. They became friends – not just work friends meeting after hours for a drink and to unwind, but real friends. The epitome of this personal growth was particularly evident on one occasion. Delilah’s favorite niece, an 8 year old girl, was struck by a car while walking to school one morning. She was critically injured. She came to work worried and distraught. The ‘team’ immediately gathered in her room and encouraged her to go home. She expressed reservation and not being there for her students. They quickly looked at her schedule and each volunteered to cover her classes. She quickly threw some plans together and the team took over from there. But that was not the end. When she left, they agreed that more was needed. They quickly gathered their calendars and set up a rotating drop-off schedule for dinners for her. They then invited other staff who might appreciate the opportunity to join in. Her family was fed for a month and this enabled her to be with her brother and niece every day at the hospital. The little girl recovered and Delilah was moved to tears at the gestures of love and friendship from her team. The professional growth that resulted from this study was both inspirational and hopeful for collaborative endeavors in the future.
Summary

In this chapter, the researcher gave voice to each person as an individual as to how they experienced a creative collaborative. This collaborative allowed for an in-depth look at the creation of a collaborative environment that involved each participant as well as the culture of collaboration and its effect on professional and personal growth. The feelings of trust and respect created an atmosphere of professionalism and teamwork and this acted as a catalyst for a culture conducive to collaboration.

The culture that the participants developed allowed for the exchange of ideas that created a sense of inclusion and respect. They felt that they were welcomed and wanted in the group. They were energized to meet with their colleagues and discuss strategies. This sense of inclusion and respect led to shared leadership that served to rekindle within them the meaning of why they had entered the teaching profession. Through this experience, the teachers were reminded of the desire to make a difference. They renewed their motivation toward growing professionally to achieve this goal. As shared leaders, participants shared the responsibility of contributing to their teammates. “I didn’t want to let them down” exemplified the professional feelings of respect and trust they had in one another.

Finally, and most significantly, the teachers experienced personal growth as a result of the collaboration. They were reignited in their passion to fulfill a purpose, which was to make a difference in the lives of children. This passion drove them in their work as a team member. This not only sparked their professional growth and the growth of their colleagues, it sparked friendships as well. The comradery and community allowed each participant to derive the comfort and security they needed to grow as persons. It was this personal growth that was identified as the critical component to the culture of collaboration.
The next chapter will examine how the theoretical framework of Vera John Steiner’s Collaborative Theory provides a lens through which to examine these experiences. In addition, these experiences will be examined in the context of the literature review with the potential of adding to the body of knowledge. Interpretations and implications of these findings will be discussed in terms of the applications to practice and recommendations for future research.
Chapter Five

Discussion of Research Findings

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of the teacher in a creative, instructional collaborative within the context of a faith-based school. The rationale for this study was based the researcher’s positionality that teachers would change their practices in significant ways when allowed to work together to achieve a common vision. Although the research has examined the impact on student achievement resulting from professional development using instructional collaboratives, there was a gap in the research connecting collaboration to a teacher’s professional growth.

The purpose of this research was to understand the phenomenon of teacher collaboration in a private, faith-based school. A qualitative interpretive phenomenology was used to provide an insider’s perspective for exploration of how participants make sense of their world. This approach provided differing perspectives on the phenomenon of collaboration from those who experienced it.

The participants in this study represented a purposeful sample of five, 8th grade educators within this particular context. These participants have experienced various types of collaborative professional learning as members of the faculty at this research site. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with these participants. This protocol allowed the researcher to engage the participants in order for them to reflect on their experience in the collaborative. Additionally, the interviews took place at a mutually agreeable time for both the researcher and the participants and in a location of the participants’ choice. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in order to capture the essence of the participants’ understanding of collaborative
teacher professional development. The researcher used these interviews to garner a better understanding of this study’s central research question: What is the experience of the teacher in a creative, instructional collaborative?

The primary goal of this research was to gather how educators experienced a creative collaborative curriculum activity. The varied viewpoints offered by these participants provided the researcher with data and personal stories that exemplified the phenomenon of teacher collaboration in a private, faith-based school context. While the research was done in a private, Jewish day school, the question of its application to public school settings, the work of VanderRiet & Durheim (2006), suggests that as the participants were 8th grade secular studies teachers, the results and may therefore be deemed valid among other middle school participants.

Ethical concerns were addressed as the researcher assured these educators that full confidentiality would be maintained. This reassurance allowed participants to share their personal insights, thoughts, and understanding of the phenomenon. As the primary focus of this study was to express participants’ viewpoints, the researcher used direct quotations from each interview as well as examples from meetings and observations. More importantly, this open sharing and use of participants’ exact words truly allowed the researcher to engage in an interpretative phenomenological analysis of the data.

This chapter provides a discussion of the major research findings in this study in relation to the theoretical framework. It also adds to the body of knowledge by comparing the results with previous studies on collaboration. The researcher concludes with recommendations for potential changes in educational practice and how this experience in a faith-based school can be utilized for different school contexts. Finally, the researcher presents suggestions for future research on teacher collaboration.
Major Themes Related to Literature

Collaboration as a Culture

The participants in this study consistently stated that the collaborative experience was a process that required a culture of support. Teachers participating in the process of a creative, instructional collaboration should have trust in the collaboration. Through this trust, the participants shared with one another and a collaborative culture was built.

This finding resonated with the work of Bryk and Schneider (2002), who found that in the presence of relational trust, teachers were willing to engage in different challenges of implementing reform, and students demonstrated academic achievement. McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) also observed that when teachers were comfortable consulting one another regarding practice, they were more open to questioning their existing approaches and trying new ones. A climate of trust among the teachers bestows a variety of benefits to the organization. People with a high degree of trust were more likely to disclose more accurate, relevant, and complete data about problems, as well as their thoughts, feelings, or ideas (Wrightsman, 1974; Zand, 1971). In organizations with a high level of trust, participants were more comfortable and were available to invest in contributing to organizational goals, rather than self-protection (Uline, et al, 1998). The teachers in this study began to discuss their lessons with one another for both its positive and negative aspects. This trust enabled them to strategize with their fellow teachers in order to problem solve. As John-Steiner (2008) noted, findings have shown that faculty that has trust in the collaborative wanted to share and “bolster the partnership” (pg. 131) of the collaborative and this allowed for a greater degree of trust. In addition, she found that trust between collaborators can support a person’s willingness to take risks in creative endeavors.
This trust development was seen during the course of the interviews conducted for this study in which the teachers expressed that sharing led to feelings of acceptance among them. This constant sharing developed within the teachers a high degree of trust. This led to symbiotic relationships. The sharing involved in the collaboration created a situation of inclusion (Mattessich & Monsay, 1992). This inclusion was necessary for the participants to feel comfortable and to continue sharing. Sharing then led to feelings of deepened trust and furthered the collaboration. Through these feelings of inclusion, interdependence among the collaborators was built.

This finding also aligned with the work of Deci and Ryan (2008) as they discussed three universal psychological needs that must be met in order to achieve well-being. When all three were met, participants demonstrated better job performance and increased job satisfaction. They were: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Inclusion directly impacted the teachers’ levels of competence. Competence was the need to feel effective and capable of performing the tasks necessary. Competence was achieved by the participants themselves. In sharing their work, the teachers supported one another and the members of the group gained competence from one another and thus continued to seek the approval of their collaborative partners. As each participant felt deeper degrees of competence, they became more secure, they felt more respected, and it increased their feelings of inclusion.

The interdependence among the teachers acted as a catalyst to shared leadership. The teachers commented that their participation in the collaborative led to their shared leadership and was another way of enhancing teacher practices. First, shared leadership encouraged the teachers to share their knowledge with each other. This encouraged supportive relationships. This aligns with the work of Morrison (2004), who states that a positive interaction with coworkers is related to job satisfaction. Allen & Meyer (1990) also found that the more emotionally attached an employee
feels, the more likely they are to stay in their position. The teachers in this study created an environment of support in which they were able to enjoy their roles in the collaborative. No one teacher took the lead and there were no ‘supervisory’ roles. Instead, they worked together and shared their thoughts and ideas. They wanted to create a unit that was conducive to student learning and created a team of equal partnerships and responsibilities. This also aligns with the work of Donaldson (2007) who explains that it is important to remove obstacles to teacher leadership for professional development to be considered highly effective. He summarizes that hierarchical structures exist in schools as they do in all organizations, and these structures must be supplemented with leadership networks for teachers to establish shared leadership. He notes that, “Teachers are leaders because their capacity to teach and improve is infectious and helps others learn more effective ways of working with their own students” (pg. 29). He reminds us that teachers have special characteristics that they bring to leadership roles, including an ability to build relationships with other teachers, an ability to maintain a sense of purpose and an ability to improve instructional practice. Teacher leaders know firsthand what is needed for their students. Patricia Phelps (2008) states that collegiality increases when teachers assume additional leadership roles and this nurtures, “open communication, open support among colleagues, celebration of successes and talk about teaching” (pg. 122). Empowering the teachers to establish shared leadership requires principals to trust in the skills of their staff members and let go of the need to control. Drago-Severson (2007) calls this shared leadership, “Providing leadership roles” (pg. 107). She says, “Mindfulness of development diversity can help in creating roles that serve as contexts for developing adults’ capacities to manage the complexities inherent in our professional and personal responsibilities” (pg. 10). Leadership must be shared to build and sustain meaningful change in schools (Elmore, 2000; Drago-Severson, 2007). As a result of this shared leadership, the
interactions between the participants were positive and increased both the success of the collaborative and the teacher’s satisfaction with the collaborative.

During each interview, each teacher noted the respect they had for their teammates. They all addressed the high degree of respect that they encountered as a result of the collaboration. This aligns with the research by Piaget (1952, 1995) that points out that respect is not fostered between individuals who hold identical values. Rather, mutual respect is based on a reciprocal relationship. When two individuals recognize each other’s values and evaluate those values by shared norms, respect is acquired. As long as one can take the perspective of the other and see how that value might be important from the other’s perspective, then mutual respect can occur. This is exactly what occurred during this collaborative study. As trust promoted the sharing of ideas, each teacher noticed the viewpoints of the others. All of the teachers commented on the fact that the exchange of ideas was more important than just listening to their peers. This sharing of ideas through listening and exchanging with each other embodies the shared normative value at work needed to the building of mutual respect. As a result, mutual respect developed between peers. They became less likely to see themselves as inferior to others, and rather, as equals (Lightfoot, 2000). Therefore, teachers can come to expect mutual respect in their relationships with others.

Richardson (2006) refers to this shared attitude of active learning as establishing an “atmosphere of mutual respect” (p. 244) in which the teachers act as equals in the learning process. Although the participants were not equals on all aspects of school life, they shared the value of active learning. They were willing to take their role as learners in order to participate as part of the team. Richardson (2006) further noted, “No matter what, your students will learn if mutual respect is an integral part of your classroom culture” (p.244). The same held true for the teachers – respect was an integral part of the classroom of collaboration.
This study has added to the body of research on building a collaborative culture by identifying that the aspects of respect, inclusion, shared leadership, and trust are not separate and exclusive of one another, as former studies may suggest. Rather, it is the sum-total of these elements that builds the culture of collaboration. Respect cannot happen without inclusion. Shared leadership develops as a result of inclusion and the end product of respect results from a culmination of them all. This sum-total builds the culture most conducive to collaboration.

Collaboration as Professional Growth

In each interview, the teachers spoke about the collegiality that was established and how this collegiality fostered professional growth. This aligns with the work of Derlin & Schneider (1994) who began discussing what motivates educators. They believed that it was increased compensation, merit awards and a restructuring of the work environment. These extrinsic motivational strategies were expected to increase job satisfaction. The results of this research proved that these factors were not effective in improving job satisfaction. In fact, the educators in the study were not motivated by extrinsic rewards at all, but instead found their motivation was in how they served others. They believed their positions allowed them to fulfill their purpose in life by making a difference in the lives of children; that they chose their careers in order to make an impact on the lives of students. Their reasons for becoming teachers were not a desire to control or make money but a focus on their roles as individuals on a mission for the greater good.

The participants found that making a difference addresses the need for autonomy and relatedness. Relatedness is the need for people to feel connected and supported by individuals in their daily interactions (Deci & Ryan, 2008). It is an intrinsic motivator. None of the participants denied stressors that came with the collaboration. However, they were able to put them into perspective by having colleagues that served as buffers and problem-solvers and this collegiality
helped them to feel safe in expressing their stressors. Stress and anxiety were replaced by plans and implementation, thus increasing their job satisfaction by providing the necessary intrinsic motivators.

This finding also related to the research of Bozeman and Gaughan (2011) who stated that research on job satisfaction focused only on extrinsic motivating factors. However, they believed that in service careers, researchers have to look at intrinsic rewards, which included self-motivated aspects of job satisfaction because teachers view their work as a career of service.

Each teacher in this study indicated that there was insufficient time allotted during the school day for teacher planning time. In particular, they commented that formal curriculum meetings rarely focused on the curriculum among grade-level teachers but instead tended to focus on subject areas, which the teachers did not find useful. They also were adamant about the time to work together and talk as teachers. This finding confirmed research by McCotter (2001), Burbank and Kauchik (2003) and Kazemi and Hubbard (2008), which suggested that collaborative teacher professional development required intentional and deliberate reflective inquiry. The lack of allotted time and subsequent follow-through on workshops indicated that more structured time was needed to implement effectively new knowledge and ideas acquired during these new learning experiences. Once time was given, the teachers made time to create professional learning development opportunities designed to keep the learning conversations ongoing and consistent.

The contribution of this study to the body of knowledge on teacher collaboration is its identification of the professional growth that resulted from a truly collaborative culture. When teachers feel a sense of respect, inclusion, shared leadership and trust from a community, they begin to open themselves up to learning. This motivation re-ignites their sense of value on the profession of education and allows them to experience again their meaning for becoming
educators: the need to fulfill a purpose and make a difference. The results were cyclical in nature; as they developed more trust and respect for one another, they became more passionate about their work and found the time that was needed to further this sense of accomplishment.

Collaboration as Personal Growth

The study provided several results that were unanticipated. The first was that teachers can experience successful, high-level collaboration in which they perceive a sense of satisfaction, mutuality, trust and growth. For the five middle school teachers in this study, their satisfactory experience with collaboration was teacher-initiated. When the participating teachers felt that they had power over their collaboration, they perceived the collaborative experience to be productive, in that they were able to engage in collegial learning (Darling-Hammond, 1998; John-Steiner, 2008). The teachers in this study found that teacher-initiated collaboration offered them trust and they were more comfortable, transparent, and open with their partners. They were also more willing to question their existing approaches and try new ones (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). The results also supported the claim that teacher collaboration can facilitate school reform. Participating teachers felt less isolation and developed more teacher knowledge. It found that more scholarly dialogue and study of the phenomenon of teacher collaboration, as a means of promoting teacher learning and building achievement, is necessary to the betterment of education.

One of the more important observations from this study was the emphasis the faculty placed on both ‘being wanted’ and on engagement with the students. The recurring themes were self-satisfaction at being wanted by their colleagues and the fact that students seemed to be more engaged in the learning when faculty and students were both engaged in the learning process.
This notion is encapsulated in the theories of Nias (2006); Darling-Hammond (2009); Bandura, (2011); Dede (2007, 2009, 2011); and many others (Becjer & Gable, 1009; Coogan, 2009; Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2009; Popiv, 2009; Zawacki-Richter, 2009). But with collaboration being a current ‘fad’, it is essential to remain grounded on the basic principle of education as engaging and exciting to the student. That engagement and excitement needs to be encouraged and modeled by the primary delivery agents of education— the teachers.

The value of collaboration for all of the participants was found in the shared accountability that all of the teachers felt for student learning. The expectations of others helped establish a positive culture of interdependence that made all teachers feel like they were part of group-based decisions. Learning opportunities such as lessons, activities, or experiences that teachers shared with each other regarding their knowledge about their areas of expertise and their knowledge about students with each other. Learning opportunities were sequenced for the teachers to facilitate their understanding of material being taught (Bruner 1968). Through collaboration, the teachers discussed factors that affected the student’s understanding of materials. Examples of these factors were: individual differences, developmental levels, and prior experiences (Bruner 1968). Together the collaborators used their expert knowledge of content to create sequenced learning opportunities for their students. These types of learning opportunities demonstrated innovative instruction intended to help both teachers and students develop a deeper, more lasting, and meaningful understanding of content and information. Learning opportunities encompassed: lessons, projects, programs, textbooks, literature, conversations, and exercises. Collaboration to create learning opportunities throughout the curriculum not only considered predisposition, structure, sequence, and reinforcement, but also took into account the process of knowledge getting (Kuhlthau 1993), and individual differences (Bruner 1968). Through collaboration, the planning of learning
opportunities and professional development was carried out jointly with each participant executing different but complementary aspects of the instruction. The teachers in this study support the views of Drago-Severson (2007) which views teacher teams as sources of individual and school growth and development. She states, “Teaming provides a fresh pathway for this as it centers on adult collaboration and dialogue.” (pg. 150).

A motivational factor behind teacher interaction lies in its direct connection to the everyday work teachers must do. As teachers engage in collaboration, they listen to their colleagues and are forced to formulate responses that require them to articulate their instructional purpose, the expected outcome, and reflect upon how closely their results match their intentions. Collaboration facilitates this process of teamwork by serving as a forcing function for interaction. The interactive dialogue expands the expertise of individuals, utilizing the pooled experiences of multiple people. Collaboration also helps teachers remain focused on the mission of education with clear goals and plans to deal with their daily demands. Collegial relationships formed through the value of collaboration breaks down the barriers of teacher isolation and giving and learning from feedback helps them establish clear goals and expectations which leads to higher rates of teacher efficacy; of teachers feeling they have a purpose and make a difference (Eaker, DuFour & DuFour, 2002). John-Steiner (2000) notes that this interdependence create a “zone of magic” (pg 191); it is a structure that is, “Formed and reformed in order to enhance the possibilities for discovery, development, and optimal expression of human talents” (pg. 191). Drago-Severson (2007) views teacher teams as sources of individual and school growth and development. Osterman & Kottkamp (2004) identify the reflective practices that are inherent in collaborative teams as, “A process of identifying, assessing, challenging and altering fundamental beliefs and assumptions that influence
Collaboration has the potential for creating a renewal in education by combining the strengths of two or more individuals in productive relationships that can positively influence student learning. Hart (1998) explains, “Collaboration is critical among the specialists whose knowledge, skills, and caring come together to serve the whole child” (pg. 90). Moving toward powerful collaborative relationships involving greater intensity and commitment may propel greater learning for both the students and teachers. In learning together, the teachers felt a particular sense of accountability to their working partners. The power of collaboration lies in the socialization of teachers learning together and being exposed to diverse opinions and distinct teaching and communication styles. The collaboration involved teachers working as equal partners and it has the potential to transform education. Through collective efforts and social learning, exciting new learning experiences could be created that “teach students to participate in the process that makes possible the establishment of knowledge” (Bruner 1968, 72).

Drago-Severson (2007) describes the benefit of professional development using collegial inquiry, “When teachers, or any adult for that matter, engage in reflective practice, they have the opportunity to become aware of their own and others’ thinking and assumptions. This awareness can, in turn, clarify thinking and help us better understand our behaviors, leading to growth. The ultimate goal of school-wide collective practice is increased student learning (pg. 155).” This consistency is built when colleagues come together and share their work. As teachers work together in collaborative structures, they develop trusting collegial relationships that enable them to deeply reflect on their work in the classroom. Bolster & Henley (2005) state, “Finding a strategy that encourages and/or supports individual teachers to change their behavior and/or tailor their
instruction so that students are successful is a challenge in the school environment” (pg. 3). In schools without collaboration the barriers created by isolation do not allow for reflection and refinement of practice, nor do they build collective responsibility for student learning. John-Steiner (2008) notes that this accountability teachers feel as a result of their commitment to shared objectives and “passionate interest” (pg. 48) is crucial to joint endeavors. It results in relinquishing some autonomy but also broadening the participants’ talents and resources that contribute to professional growth. This mutually beneficial collaboration provides a mirror to an individual, broadening his or her self-knowledge, which is crucial to creativity. In turn, they feel accountable to not only themselves but to the group as a whole because it was through the group collaboration that they broadened their knowledge. Collaboration allows the individual to transcend time and habit and achieve a fuller self; beyond the limitations and talents of the isolated individual. Their identity grows through the partnership, through the interweaving of social and individual processes and they are broadened, redefined and changed as a result of the collaborative endeavor. She further states that collaboration supports the idea that productive interdependence is a critical resource for expanding the self; it calls for reconsidering theories that limit development and open up possibilities to grow as an individual by way of a team.

This renewal involved organizational changes and creative ways of structuring curricula for greater success. It also involved a commitment to providing an atmosphere of creativity, diversity of thinking, and learning within a rich context of inquiry and problem-solving. The task cannot be accomplished alone, but through collaboration it can be achieved. Professional growth through collaboration provides an avenue for teachers to feel valued and central to the success of the school. Collaboration therefore, motivated and inspired the teachers to continue the collaboration, thereby continuing their professional growth. Drago-Severson (2007) explained, “To build a school
that is a true learning center – a place that nurtures adults and children’s learning and development – reflective practice and collegial inquiry need to be part of that school’s culture” (pg. 155).

This study has added to the body of knowledge by identifying that the one important aspect that other studies had only touched upon and that is the aspect of personal growth. As the teachers built a culture conducive to collaboration, their trust and respect for one another grew. They shared leadership roles and felt included as part of a team. This sense of teamwork renewed their hopes of being able to fulfill a purpose in their lives – the need to make a difference in the lives of children. But it did something else. It also made them aware that they made a difference in the lives of their co-workers. They became friends. They spoke outside of the classroom and school. They shared personal stories and as a result, grew as individuals. It was this individual, personal growth that sparked in each participant the desire and the need to continue the collaboration. This element of personal growth was found to be the most important in the culture of collaborative learning. Without it, there was no reason to continue. It was the aspect of personal growth that made all of the participants excited and happy not only to work on the lessons, but to work together with the people on their team and share their work as well as their lives. It was the sum total of all elements necessary to a successful collaboration that created the personal growth that fueled the collaboration into continuing.

Collaboration and the Jewish Day School

The study affirmed the results noted in the literature review that spoke to the fact that Jewish community schools should be taking collaboration very seriously. It stated that collaboration embraces the theory that creativity and innovation emerge when people collaborate and it empowers them and develops trust that enables them to tackle far-reaching issues in their environments. Kasloff (2014) identified the impact teacher collaboration had on the Jewish
community of Denver. As teachers became invested in the practice and included as a voice through their respective collaborations, they became closer as a unit and more vested in the school and were seen as partners in learning and advocates for education. This study also found the same to be true. The teachers became more invested and they became comfortable in allowing their voices to be heard. What was even more interesting however is the fact that the subject matter of the Holocaust did not negatively impact the conversations and perhaps even enhanced them. They looked to each other as colleagues as well as professionals and the gentile teachers were regarded with authority and respect as the Jewish teachers felt that their knowledge of the Holocaust had more depth. There were even the conversations that people expect that Jews should know a great deal about the Holocaust. In fact, Syrian Jews (the majority of this population) were not involved in the Holocaust at all and their knowledge is very shallow. Not only were the gentile teachers highly regarded for their knowledge, they were sought after in terms of questions and information as much needed to be learned by the group prior to teaching the lessons. Erica was seen as the authority on the subject given her expertise in history. Those team members who were Jewish identified less as Jews and more as part of the team. They were unafraid to share how little they knew about the Holocaust in order to gain the necessary knowledge needed to teach the unit correctly and not let their teammates down. Their beliefs and identity as Jews were usurped by their belief and identity as members of a collaborative team charged with teaching the Holocaust.

The faith-based culture of the school, along with the unit of study on the Holocaust connected the participants in terms of their values and commitments. The atmosphere for a faith-based school fostered the commitment of the participants to the collaborative and created a depth and richness to their experience.
Results Related to Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of Collaborative Learning focuses on the importance of collaborative learning being at the heart of professional learning communities. It is fundamental to understanding the implications of the collaborative. John-Steiner (2000) states:

“The principles in true collaboration represent complimentary domains of expertise. As collaborators not only do they plan, decide and act jointly, they also think together, combining conceptual schemes to create original frameworks. Also, in true collaboration, there is a commitment to shared resources, power and talent: no individual’s point of view dominates, authority for decisions and actions reside in the group, and work products reflect a blending of all participants contributions. They become a thought community” (pgs. 40-41).

According to John-Steiner (2008) this thought community happens due to the sense of trust the partners feel. Trust supports a person’s willingness to take risks; it illustrates “self-in relation” (pg. 79), which is the notion that that the self develops in the contest of important relationships” By spreading the risk among partners, each participant is encouraged to take more chances. In taking more chances, they realize more about themselves and this realization leads to the discovery that they can increase their feelings of competence and security through these interactions with their partners. John-Steiner (2008) notes that through this sharing, they learned from each other and were willing to take more risks in order to continue learning about themselves. They were open to experimentation; willing to face failure; and prepared to take criticism and suggestions from their colleagues in the collaborative.
John-Steiner also notes that because of the ‘mutual care-taking’ needed in collaboration, collegiality is built, but more importantly, growth is experienced by each participant in the collaboration. The results of this study verified John-Steiner’s work in that this care-taking done via the collaboration, thrived on diversity of perspectives and on constructive dialogues between individuals to negotiate their differences, while creating shared vision and values. This led to greater autonomy. Autonomy is the feeling that one’s behavior is self-determined and that resulting outcomes are based on personal choices (Deci & Ryan, 2008). The participants in this study exercised autonomy by making choices that best fit their role in the collaborative. They did not attempt to achieve for themselves, but instead, they established goals for the group as a whole. John-Steiner refers to this sense of shared leadership as ‘collective sense-making’ (pg. 193); the idea that in a true collaborative, decision making is distributed, as there is no central authority solely in charge. There is a need to “act in order to think: (pg. 193), where shared experiences lead to engagement and the need to make sense of the experience. There is an interest in joint learning and problem solving together and is this mutual dependence, these shared beliefs, that leads to a community think and the individual’s responsibility to the community as a whole and not just themselves.”

Each participant focused on the best interests of the children throughout the collaborative. Collegiality and trust were built. They became part of a team. John-Steiner (2008) addresses this as well and notes that collaboratives emphasize the role of trust and mutual regard as central to the collaboration. The collaborative becomes a comfortable process and as such, the collaborators enjoy each other. They accept each other’s complements and criticisms and by doing so, their respect for one another grows. There is a willingness to compromise and let go of stylistic
preferences in order to achieve maximum results for the group. As this happens, personalities click and respect deepens. They share in the learning and in the growing.

In turn, this made the teachers feel like they had a purpose and made a difference. They became confident in their level of competence and thus more aware of their own skill sets. This awareness led to increased collaboration. This aligns with the framework of John-Steiner (2008) who noted that collaboration requires individuals to relinquish aspects of their autonomy but that this results in the broadening of the participants’ talents and modes of thought. The thinking and creativity involved in collaboration is individual but it leads to a broadening of the individual person and gives them a better sense of self. This generates a deeper sense of trust and promotes social thinking, which is what collaboration entails. Collaboration involves “knowing things and learning how to know” (John-Steiner, 2008, pg. 43) and this leads each member of the collaboration to the development of an understanding of the world and themselves; of a deepened mutuality and trust. The teachers felt that they were more collegial and this led to their experiencing the ‘we-ness’ that collaboration brings, as presented by the framework of Vera John-Steiner (2000) who also defined this pooled intelligence as a “thought community of interactive scholars committed to transformation…they are experienced thinkers who engage in joint efforts as they struggle against society’s pull toward individual achievement.”

John-Steiner (2008) noted that when individuals are engaged in collaboration, they lower the boundaries of self and efface their personalities. They listen carefully and are attentive to the needs of the joint purpose. Each individual in the collaboration contributes. They increase their capacity to offer empathy, support, and trust that in isolation is only minimally realized. By working collaboratively, they fulfill their desire to and make a difference in the lives of children.
The collaborative process drives them in their work and from this they develop feelings of joy and a sense of accomplishment.

John-Steiner (2008) found that an individual’s personality is a system rather than a collection of traits. By watching others with whom they worked, the teachers in this study challenged themselves to try to keep up with that person and absorb the other’s belief in their capabilities. As they participated in these collaborative relationships, they developed different emotional resources than those working in isolation. This relationship of diversity and growth is defined by John-Steiner as complementarity and collaboration benefits from complementarity in skills, experience, and perspectives and creates a passionate interest in the subject matter. This passion is a critical component to collaboration.

Implications for Future Research

This study has implications for the expansion of teacher collaboration and the inclusion of the teacher in driving the collaboration. This study provided insight into the academic pathways, challenges, and triumphs of teachers experiencing an instructional collaborative. Because the literature is limited in teacher-driven collaborations, this study provided an opportunity for educators, researchers, and administrators to better understand the potential impact that current administratively-driven collaborations have on teachers’ professional and personal growth.

This study focused on the teacher experience in the collaborative, yet there are several groups of studies suggested that could be pursued based on the findings of the research undertaken here. Studies could be established that could be conducted across several departments or grade levels in both elementary and secondary education that would allow a comparison and contrast with this study.
In addition, one could investigate the various stressors and motivations among staff members. The differences in perception as to stressors and motivators would add to the research on teacher motivation and the potential power struggles within the collaboration. The use of surveys would allow for a quantitative comparison of how faculty members perceive collaboration based on their subject, grade-level, and stressor and motivators.

The differences in perception of definitions of collaboration could also generate new areas of research, including the dynamics of power within the collaboration, seniority status of the teacher, and ethnic and racial diversity within different collaborative teams. It could also be interesting to study the rate of assimilation of novice teachers using teacher-driven collaboratives.

Studies could be established to determine if students make a difference in teacher-driven collaborations. Students in various grade levels, of various abilities and ethnic and racial backgrounds could be studied to see if teacher driven collaboration bridges any gaps, increases test scores, or increases student self-efficacy. The design of this type of study would be qualitative as we would be judging perception based on learning environments (Creswell, Hanson, Clark & Morales, 2006; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Most significantly, the culture of the faith-based school created for the participants a shared value and commitment to the unit of study as well as the collaborative itself. How wonderful it would be to provide an atmosphere where teachers took it upon themselves to foster an initiative in which they could collaborate; for administrators to provide a haven in which teachers felt free to express themselves and create opportunities to grow and learn and experience the phenomena that teachers in this study experienced. It would be interesting for future studies to investigate the both
the dispositions of teachers in a faith-based school versus those of public schools, as well as the culture of a faith-based school that allowed for the space in which this collaborative took place.

The interviews conducted with these participants and the findings presented in this chapter have allowed the researcher to suggest future topics of research regarding collaborative professional development within this study’s context. Since this study examined the experience of the teacher in a creative collaborative, future research should examine how novice teachers and administrators specifically understand this construct. In addition, future studies should be done as follow-ups to this one to see if collaboration using this methodology can be in place long term.

Finally, more work could be done in the context of the Jewish day school. As an independent school, there are fewer restraints as far as curriculum and content and there is a wider array of topics that can be studied as far as collaboration as there is not the restrictive timeline of impending state tests. Collaboratives could be done across grades and departments as well as by student groups. By using independent schools in this capacity, there is the ability to perfect the strategies needed to successfully collaborate and then apply them to the more stringent setting of public schools. This type of school would also help to inform the research on collaboratives as it captures the essence of the teacher experience. It informs educators on all levels as to what teachers consider to be the most important factors in collaboration, which include: inclusion, trust, shared leadership, and respect. These factors promoted professional and personal growth and, so it stands to reason that these same factors should hold true for teachers in other settings.
The Meaning of a Collaborative Culture

The findings presented in this study have highlighted the teachers’ experiences in a creative collaborative in the context of a private, faith-based middle school. The researcher addressed the problem of practice with a purposeful sample of educators who participated in this study that represented a cross-section of individuals who have participated in collaboratives. Collaborative practices have been defined as central to professional development because they further opportunities for teachers to establish networks of relationships through which they may reflectively share their practice, revisit beliefs on teaching and learning and co-construct knowledge (Achinstein, 2002; Chang & Pang, 2006). There is also research to support that collaborative group learning is the most powerful form of professional development (Arter, 2001; Garmston & Wellman, 1999; Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Zeichner & Somekh, 2000). Research has indicated the impact of teacher collaborative learning on student learning but there is little current research on how it benefits the teachers as individuals. Accordingly, this study has provided insight into the problem of practice examined and its ability to influence how teachers and school leaders develop, execute, and continue collaborative practices within the context of private, faith-based schools.

Implications for Professional Practice

The unique nature of this study’s context has provided an opportunity to examine how private faith-based school leaders and teachers develop strong collaborative learning experiences for teachers. Since private, faith-based schools have lacked consistency in the implementation and execution of collaborative professional learning, this study has helped school leaders within this context. This study has demonstrated the need to foster a collaborative culture by providing time for teachers to work together as well as an atmosphere that does not pressure teachers to remediate...
or reform their work. By providing the necessary culture for collaboration, school leaders will build
collieal and trusting relationships with all members of the school community. By providing a
culture conducive to collaboration, school leaders will begin to see the emergence of professional
learning communities. These communities of practice will gather like-minded individuals together
in a culture conducive to improving their craft.

In addition to this study’s significance for school leaders, this study provided understanding
of how a collaborative culture is built. The researcher used the stories and experiences of the
participants in order to underscore their perception about this phenomenon. The teachers
interviewed offered a variety of experiences about their role in this collaborative. The participants
agreed that their learning was enhanced both professionally and personally. They spoke about their
need for a sense of trust, inclusion, shared leadership, and respect. They spoke about their sense of
teamwork and time. This finding suggests that schools need to foster a culture conducive to
collaboration. Schools need to allow teachers to develop their own professional development
opportunities which create professional learning communities which foster growth. This study has
provided educators within this context the information needed to create collaborative cultures in a
similar fashion to the participants in this study.

The micro-level significance of this study suggests that teachers viewed collaboration that
they initiated as more valuable to them than those collaborations in their past that had been
mandated or initiated by the school’s administration. A perception of teacher ownership in the
formation of the collaborative relationships seemed to promote teacher satisfaction with the
experience. The findings also suggest that teacher-initiated collaboratives that were more student-
centered and involved a small group of teachers proved to be more beneficial to the teachers.
Administratively-initiated collaboratives involved larger groups of teachers and were generally
data-driven. The teachers in this study viewed smaller partnerships to be more satisfying than their
previous, larger-group, collaboratives. A perception of teacher agency in the formation of the
collaborative relationships seems to promote teacher satisfaction with the experience. This aligns
with the findings of Kreesburg (1992) who observed that when individuals find “ways to satisfy
their desire and to fulfill their interests without imposing on one another” (pg. 85), they develop a
relationship of co-agency. It appears that for the teachers in this study, perceptions of mutuality and
co-agency were best achieved with small groups rather than larger groups of teammates.

From the findings of this study, it appears that the participating teachers viewed
collaboration that they initiated as more valuable to them than those collaborations in their past. In
this collaborative experience, the teachers described a sense of mutuality, trust, and equality with
their collaborative partners. Kreesburg (1992) observed that when individuals find ways to satisfy
their desires and to fulfill their interests without imposing on one another, they develop a
relationship of collaboration. By encouraging teachers to initiate collaborative partnerships, and by
including teachers in the formation of collaborative groups, administrators can promote a sense of
teacher agency in the collaborative. This study aligns with the findings of Schneider & Schneider
(1975) which found that the way in which individuals establish support helps to form their systems
of norms, expectations, and values. This, in turn, improves job satisfaction and teacher practices
are enhanced by this solid foundation due to clear goals, plans and expectations. Teachers are also
more aware of their direction and the direction of their school. When teachers feel that they have
the trust and respect of their colleagues, they are not afraid to share their leadership and expertise.
This promotes personal growth. This collaboration encouraged comradery and through this
comradery, the teachers trust in one another deepened; they felt included in the decisions of the
team, and the leadership was shared. This deepened the members’ respect for one another and
created a culture of collaboration.

Establishing support for the collaboration through trust, inclusion, shared leadership, and
respect provided the participants with a solid base to develop strong support systems. This base
allowed them to feel confident in their own abilities and this allowed them to focus on the issues
unique to their subject matter or students. Through this understanding, they moved forward to build
a collaborative rooted in teacher personal growth.

Re-evaluating the Researcher’s Positionality to the Study’s Problem of Practice

I have always found teacher collaboration to be of great interest. I have concluded that
my own educational experiences have made this particular phenomenon of great interest to
me. Over the course of my professional experiences however, I have come to understand that
not all individuals have an understanding, or a respect for, the value of collaboration.
Therefore, I have become sensitized to the fact that my level of understanding and
appreciation of this topic varies greatly from those of my peers.

During the course of this project and my work with research participants, I have come to
realize why some of my colleagues and I have developed different understandings of this topic.
Their past experiences served as reminders for why collaboration is often seen in a negative
light and hence, why it subsequently fails. My vulnerability in sharing the successes and
failures of my practice has made me a stronger teacher. Subsequently, this research has further
developed my understanding of how my colleagues process a similar sense of vulnerability and
it made me sensitive to their willingness to participate in these discussions. To my great
satisfaction, and as the collaborative relationships grew deeper, their willingness to convey
openly and honestly about their fears and feelings regarding collaboration really allowed for a more meaningful look at the experience of the teacher in a creative collaborative. The differing viewpoints allowed me to examine this problem of practice through a different lens, and this modified lens has expanded my interpretation of this problem of practice.

Over the course of this doctoral research project, I have developed a new awareness of the variety of perspectives that exist surrounding this study’s problem of practice. Throughout the time I have spent living the problem in my work context, reviewing the literature on collaborative professional development, and the time spent with interview participants, I have developed a greater desire to continue the conversation on this topic with as many people as possible.

The opportunity to interview teachers involved in a collegial collaborative on a unit of their choosing was amazing. The candor with which Allen, Beatrice, Charles, Delilah and Erica shared their experiences regarding collaboration, as well as their personal and educational journeys during the collaboration, was a very rewarding experience. They join teachers everywhere in their quest to grow both professionally and personally. I was excited to see their views of collaboration transform. It was also exciting to see their enthusiasm as they shared with one another this experience as well as their own growth. It was also very affirming to hear how each of them wishes for more of this same type of collaborative.

This interpretative phenomenological study was limited to five volunteer participants. Because of the small sample size and qualitative nature of the study, the findings may not generalizable to other populations or settings.

Another limitation was the use of semi-structured interviews. They were used to collect the data in a systematic manner, however because participants were encouraged to openly share their
experiences, there was a lack of consistency as to how much thought to each response participants gave. The researcher made a conscious effort to not steer responses but did seek to have the participants provide textured and descriptive responses.

Conclusion

This study sought to answer the question of how teachers in a private, faith-based school experience collaboration. In particular, the researcher engaged the study’s participants in interviews where they shared their unique perspectives on their experiences in relation to this phenomenon. Through the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis, the researcher interpreted the experiences of each participant in an attempt to gain deeper insight into how teachers made sense of their understanding of collaboration. In addition to the researcher’s interpreting the meaning of this construct for each research participant, this study gave a voice to the individual experiences and positionality of each participant at the research site. Moreover, the key findings presented in this study shed light on how teachers within this particular context participated in and made sense of their experience of creating an instructional collaborative. The research presented the findings that speak to the meaning that each research participant experienced in their relation to participating in building a collaborative culture and its effect on professional and personal growth.

The researcher provided recommendations for future practice and research possibilities. The research findings demonstrated the unique experiences of each participant as well as a connection to the literature within the field of teacher professional development.

Much needs to be done by schools to provide teachers with opportunities to learn and grow alongside their colleagues in a collegial, non-threatening arena. By allowing administrators to determine how to best drive teacher collaboration, there could continue to exist the potentially negative feelings of a lack of both personal and professional growth by teachers.
Schools should seek ways to remedy the feelings of isolation, lack of self-worth and lack of personal and professional growth. Teacher-driven collaboration is a pathway to educational growth for both teachers and administrators.

Because the literature is limited in teacher-driven collaborations, this study provided an opportunity for educators, researchers, and administrators to better understand the potential impact that current administratively driven collaborations have on teachers ‘professional and personal growth.

Additionally, this study provides an opportunity to see how teacher-driven collaboration opportunities may have positive impacts on professional learning communities. This study highlighted the need for the inclusion of the teacher in collaboration and it provided an opportunity to see how teacher-driven collaboration positively affected a teacher’s professional and personal growth.

This study has implications for the expansion of teacher collaboration and the inclusion of the teacher in driving the collaboration as it provided insight into the academic pathways, challenges, and triumphs of schools trying to establish a collaborative culture.
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professional learning communities*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational
Service.


Dear Prospective Participants,

As the final phase of my doctorate program approaches, it is necessary for me to complete a research project. Among the most effective forms of research, are those that can be conducted in the setting where change is occurring. Therefore, as a change agent in the organization, I am inviting you to participate in this study. The primary goal of this study is to explain the teacher experience in a collegial collaborative. The analysis of the findings from this project will be used to identify gaps between the current practices in collaboration and the needs of 21st century teachers. Additionally, once the conclusions are reached, this project will contribute to the existing body of research that informs 21st century global professional development practices. As the primary researcher in this study, I am inviting you to participate in this study and requesting your consent to conduct an interview. The interview will consist of questions and last 30-60 minutes, which pertain to your experience in the collaborative practices throughout the May and June of the 2014-2015 school year. As part of the informed consent process, it is important for the following to be clarified:

- Your participation in this study is voluntary and may be discontinued at any time. Although interview questions are not designed to be invasive, you may refuse to answer any of them throughout the process. Your decision to participate in this study will not have any effect on your position within the organization.
- Participants will not be offered compensation for their participation in this project.
- It is anticipated that participants may benefit from involvement in this study because they will be provided the opportunity to share their experiences and impressions of the organization's collaborative model. Sharing these insights may result in additional professional development opportunities or demonstrate growth relative to your practices.
- Although your anonymity cannot be assured throughout this process, participants will be assigned pseudonyms, which will help to maintain confidentiality throughout the organization and educational
community. Study participants will not be identified by name in any of the projects' publications.

- Evaluation is not the intent of this research project, therefore the impressions or insights shared throughout this project will not affect annual reviews or employment status. The sole purpose of the project is to gather insights from educators, pertaining to impressions of existing and future professional development models for collaboration within the organization.

- A transcript of your interview will be provided to you for your review. After reviewing the transcript, it will be your right to withhold any information from the study and subsequent analysis. Additionally, you will have the opportunity to provide feedback about your contributions.

- It is my intent to protect your wellbeing by ensuring that any challenges or obstacles that are discussed during the interviews are not regarded as individual weaknesses, rather they are opportunities for organizational change.

- As a participant in this study, you will be asked to participate in Member Checking. This is a validation strategy, which is commonly used by researchers, to solicit your impressions of the research findings and interpretations. In order to participate in member checking, you will be provided with a preliminary draft of the research data and case study summary, to review judiciously. The comments, which you provide during this process, will be documented and reflected throughout the study results that are published in the final Doctoral Thesis (DT).

- Digital recordings, which are used to document interviews, will be deleted and destroyed following transcription and analysis.

- As the study is currently designed, I do not anticipate that your participation in this project poses any immediate risk or harm to you. As a study participant, I am seeking your consent for the following:
  - Interview: It is required that all participants partake in one semi-structured interview throughout this study. As the interview protocol and questions are designed, it is anticipated that interviews will not last longer than 45 minutes. Interviews will be conducted, privately, within the teachers' classrooms between the hours of 12:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m., or, at another time that is more convenient for the study participants. To ensure accuracy, interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed. The researcher's goal for the interview is to determine how teachers experience a collegial collaboration. It is anticipated that these individual interviews will occur during the spring of 2015.
Member Checking: Validation is a critical component of this research study. Therefore, as a research participant, you will be asked to review my analysis and interpretations for accuracy. Your thoughtful and judicious review of my findings and subsequent conclusions are invaluable, and will serve as verification for the investigation. As the principal researcher for this investigation, I vow to limit the time you are required to allocate for the review of my findings. It is anticipated that you will be asked to partake in member checking throughout the spring of 2015. Should you have any questions or concerns about participation in this research, please do not hesitate to contact me at: tallman.t@husky.neu.edu or 732-492-3408 or Dr. Nancy Young, Principal Investigator, at dryoung4@gmail.com. Should you have any questions, pertaining to your rights throughout this research project, please contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. She may also be contacted at n.regina@neu.edu or 617-373-4588. It should be noted that your inquiry will remain anonymous.

By providing your signature below, you are indicating your consent to participate in an interview and agree to participate in Member Checking as a validation strategy:

_____________________________________  ____________ _____
Participant Signature     Date

_____________________________________  ____________ _____
Participant's Printed Name

_____________________________________  ____________ _____
Principal Researcher's Signature     Date

_____________________________________  ____________ _____
Researcher's Printed Name
Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Date: _____________ Duration of Interview: ____

Interviewee: ____________ Interviewer: Tamara O. Tallman

Guiding Questions

1. What has been your experience in the past with collaboration?

2. What, if anything did you gain from that experience?

3. Do you continue to have that collaborative? Why or why not?

4. What did you gain from this collaborative?

5. What did you hope to gain from this collaborative?

6. What group contributions were productive?

7. What group contributions were not productive?

8. Do you hope the group works together again? Why or why not?

9. What did you personally gain from this experience?

10. How can you continue to offer your colleagues your expertise?
11. How can you continue to learn from your colleague’s expertise?

12. Was this to continue, what problem do you think the group might face and what strategies would you use to overcome them?

Appendix C

Letter to Principal

Dr. Ruth Katz
Hillel Yeshiva School
1025 Deal Road
Deal, NJ 07712

Dear Dr. Katz:

I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership and Curriculum at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts. I am writing my dissertation to examine the experience of the teacher in a collegial collaborative. I believe the understanding of the teacher experience is crucial to principals and curriculum coordinators in the planning and implementation of professional development.

I will be interviewing five members of the middle school staff. The interview will be focused on their experience of the collegial collaborative. Each member of the staff will be given a pseudonym and each interview will be member checked to ensure validity. Once the project is complete, you will receive a copy of my research conclusions in an effort to make a contribution to your school.

I will be contacting you in a week to determine if you agree/decline my request to interview members of your staff.

Thank you in advance for your willingness to have your staff members participate and to contribute to the extension of the knowledge base related to collaboration.

Sincerely,

Tamara Tallman
Teacher, Hillel Yeshiva
Deal, NJ
Appendix D

The following are the tables, by participant, of the development of the emergent themes of the pre and post-collaborative interviews.

**Figure 6A- Table of Emergent Themes for Teacher A**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Original Transcript</th>
<th>Exploratory Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time/Support</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>“Not enough time”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegiality/Sharing</td>
<td>4.16; 6.3</td>
<td>“Not allowed to play in their pool”; “I was allowed to share – even asked.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work without Fear</td>
<td>1.3; 5.2; 6.1</td>
<td>“They’re afraid”; “Getting in trouble”; “Looking bad to administration.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a Difference/Feel</td>
<td>3.7; 3.10; 6.10</td>
<td>“I’m an also”; “When I’m allowed”; Somehow I added value,”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valued</td>
<td></td>
<td>“More relaxed”; “Saw my colleagues differently”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>6.13; 6.17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Figure 6B- Table of Emergent Themes for Teacher B**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Original Transcript</th>
<th>Exploratory Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time/Support</td>
<td>7.13</td>
<td>“There’s no time to talk and everyone wants their own room”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.15; 8.16</td>
<td>“Everyone wants their own room.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.20</td>
<td>“Conniving against her”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegiality/Sharing</td>
<td>8.34; 9.5</td>
<td>“It was light and all about the kids. This is what learning is supposed to look like.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a Difference/Feel Valued</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>“It was so much more meaningful”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth</td>
<td></td>
<td>“These people really do want to work with me”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Figure 6C - Table of Emergent Themes for Teacher C**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Original Transcript</th>
<th>Exploratory Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time/Support</td>
<td>11.14</td>
<td>“Teachers need to make sure their scores are right – but I could help”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegiality/Sharing</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>“If we really worked together, I would be recognized as having value”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work without Fear</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a Difference/Feel Valued</td>
<td>15.6; 15.8</td>
<td>“I helped.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>“Not responsible by themselves.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I think they saw that I could help.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Figure 6D- Table of Emergent Themes for Teacher D**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Original Transcript</th>
<th>Exploratory Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time/Support</td>
<td>18.5; 18.17</td>
<td>“I have my ‘niche’ – I do that.”; “Really, there’s no time.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegiality/Sharing</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>“I never knew he was so smart.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work without Fear</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a Difference/Feel Valued</td>
<td>20.11</td>
<td>“I liked being part of a bigger picture.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>20.15; 21.8</td>
<td>“I learned more about my kids.”; “I need to do more of this.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6E- Table of Emergent Themes for Teacher E**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Original Transcript</th>
<th>Exploratory Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time/Support</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>“Had it once”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegiality/Sharing</td>
<td>22.18</td>
<td>“Counting on me”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work without Fear</td>
<td>23.11</td>
<td>“Don’t want to upset anyone.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Line From Original Transcript</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trust in My Work Environment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I worked with a colleague on a project but I had to keep it to myself”</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We did some great things together she and I but I was afraid to let anyone know”</td>
<td>178-179</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“They always questioned me, Is it just conversation or a set-up?”</td>
<td>284</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“They always wanted more. We were always being looked at to do more. Is it because they think we weren’t doing our job?”</td>
<td>304</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I would sit and talk to a teacher and they would want to know what we are talking about – why?”</td>
<td>495</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support for My Work</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I wanted to do more but I got this attitude of ‘Don’t play in my pool’”</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“There was just no respect for what I do”</td>
<td>192</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I’m not just smart in my subject”</td>
<td>277</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I feel like I was there to babysit sometimes – don’t they know what I can do?”</td>
<td>315</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Did they get how much I have to offer? Why don’t they value me?”</td>
<td>501</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sharing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I would want to help but sometimes I needed help too”</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I have so much to give!”</td>
<td>199</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“When I would try to help my colleagues – I’m ’spying’ What is that?”</td>
<td>253-254</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling</td>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting to Work without Fear</td>
<td>“Why can’t the teachers talk more? It’s like they are afraid that we were talking.”</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting to Work without Fear</td>
<td>“I felt alone. I wanted to do things with my fellow teachers.”</td>
<td>477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting to Work without Fear</td>
<td>“I always felt judged”</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting to Work without Fear</td>
<td>“It was a constant evaluation – no matter how mundane the topic.”</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting to Work without Fear</td>
<td>“I never felt like I had a friend.”</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting to Work without Fear</td>
<td>“I felt like I was constantly being watched and judged.”</td>
<td>387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting to Work without Fear</td>
<td>“I wasn’t sure if I was ever doing the right thing.”</td>
<td>500-501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegiality</td>
<td>“I wish I had work friends”</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collegiality</td>
<td>“I wish they knew that I’m not just smart in my subject”</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegiality</td>
<td>“I have so many resources – not just babysitting services.”</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegiality</td>
<td>“I wanted to do more but it was always resisted.”</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegiality</td>
<td>“They never liked us talking to each other.”</td>
<td>490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making a Difference</td>
<td>“I’m here because I want to be”</td>
<td>603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making a Difference</td>
<td>“I love my job and I love these kids”</td>
<td>715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making a Difference</td>
<td>“I love the high track. I’m glad they saw my talents.”</td>
<td>861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making a Difference</td>
<td>“The resources I have are innumerable and when I’m asked, the teachers were always surprised.”</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making a Difference</td>
<td>“I really make a difference sometimes I think.”</td>
<td>797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>“I learned so much about myself!”</td>
<td>665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>“I love that I was accepted for what I do”</td>
<td>701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>“I really have learned so much – about me and my friends.”</td>
<td>758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>“I’m better every year!”</td>
<td>805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>“I’m a better person for what I do.”</td>
<td>942</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix E

**Figure 8 – Identifying Recurrent Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-Ordinate Themes</th>
<th>Teacher A</th>
<th>Teacher B</th>
<th>Teacher C</th>
<th>Teacher D</th>
<th>Teacher E</th>
<th>Present In Over Half the Sample?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trust \textit{(Process of Group Collaborative Experience)}</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support \textit{(Process of Group Collaborative Experience)}</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegiality \textit{(Making a Difference)}</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing (<em>Making a Difference</em>)</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Without Fear (<em>Process of Group Collaborative Experience</em>)</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a Difference/Value (<em>Making a Difference</em>)</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth (<em>Process of Group Collaborative Experience</em>)</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
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</tbody>
</table>