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Principals Perceptions of Factors Affecting Teacher Collaboration in Secondary Schools

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PRINCIPALS’ PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS AFFECTING TEACHER COLLABORATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

by

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This study is in memory of Forrest Myers, Phyllis Myers, and Dan Myers. They instilled in me and my brother Troy the motivation to get our education, work hard, and persevere through difficult times.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Karen Myers, who has consistently encouraged and supported me in my quest of education. Her total devotion and love inspires me daily.
Title: Principals Perceptions of Factors Affecting Teacher Collaboration in Secondary Schools (Under the direction of Dr. Donny Lee)

This qualitative multi-case study examined how various practicing secondary principals in the Northwest Region of Arkansas perceive teacher collaboration within secondary schools. Job-embedded opportunities for teacher collaboration have been cited as successful ways for promoting teacher learning, which in turn will promote increased student learning (Little, 1990). Researchers and theorists cite properly supported collaboration as key to lasting school improvement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 1997; Little, 1990). In order for the practice of collaboration to be embedded in secondary schools, a culture must be created within a supportive environment to support the collaborative efforts. DuFour and Eaker (1998) credit creating an environment conducive for teacher collaboration as the most important factor when considering school improvement initiatives.

Data instruments used in this study were focus group interviews with the researcher acting as moderator of the focus groups. Findings from this study showed that principals are most likely to have the greatest influence on the capacity of teachers to become more collaborative and on changing the current practice of teachers instructing in isolation the majority of the time (Inger, 1993; Whitaker, 2003). To plan for the needed
changes in secondary schools, an understanding is needed of principals’ perceptions of factors affecting teacher collaboration. To provide such an understanding, focus group interviews were held with secondary principals from Northwest Arkansas. Three focus groups were held, from which the data were collected and analyzed for emerging themes.

This qualitative study provides a description of secondary principals’ perceptions of the factors affecting teacher collaboration in their schools, including how the process unfolded, what the major events in the process were, what the barriers to the process were, and what strategies facilitated such collaboration. This study also describes how principals attempt to support teacher collaboration, and what training and supports they feel need to be in order to improve teacher collaboration in their secondary schools. Finally, outcomes from the process of teacher collaboration were enumerated by practicing principals.

The research findings indicate that the secondary principals in this study identified several factors that influenced the existing condition of teacher collaboration in their schools. Principals viewed some of the factors as being successfully implemented and practiced, some of the factors as difficult to address due to barriers, and some of the factors within their influence to impact if trainings, changes, supports, or professional development became embedded as a part of the daily practice at their school.

Secondary principals may consider the findings of this study to compliment their plans for improving teacher collaboration in their schools. Educational researchers may examine the findings of this study as the basis of future qualitative or quantitative research to add to the existing knowledge base concerning teacher collaboration.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Education reform is not a new enterprise for Americans. Over the last 100 years, the nature of America’s vision of what schools need to be doing and how teachers need to be trained has evolved. In the late 1800’s, traditional educators saw high school as a college preparatory institution. This divided students into two groups: those who would pursue an academic course of study to prepare for higher education, and those for whom high school was the termination of formal study. Such placements were often based on economic, social, and ethnic backgrounds. From that time forward, governmental mandates have spurred a plethora of reform initiatives.

Yecke (2004) gives context to federal involvement. Yecke explains that the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed during the Johnson administration to provide funding for school Districts. This funding was to help children from disadvantaged families overcome the educational deficits that hampered the students’ performance and prevented them from performing as well as their peers academically. The funding was to ensure education would be the passport from poverty for children. Specifically, Title I was the vehicle to provide educational funding for the children in poverty.

After four decades, the law came under scrutiny as to whether any significant decrease in the achievement gap between whites and minorities had occurred. Disparities among various groups of students and the fact that an achievement gap existed across the
country was well documented and a cause for alarm at that time. Federal officials internalized the full magnitude of that problem and the need to rethink what counted as educational reform existed (Yecke, 2004).

It became even more apparent to federal officials in the 1990s that the achievement of minority students was not catching up to that of white students, even though the federal dollars were constantly increasing (Yecke, 2004). Although the achievement gap for minorities narrowed in the 1970s and 1980s, performance decreased after 1988 nationally. Yecke noted that the achievement in math and science remained somewhat flat for non-Asian minority students.

A reauthorization of ESEA in 1994, also known as the *Improving America’s Schools Act*, provided for testing, data disaggregation, measures of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), and consequences for not meeting AYP goals. By the end of 2000, all states were receiving funding, but only eleven states complied with the law (Yecke, 2004).

The *Academic Achievement Act for All Act* surfaced in 1999. The Act, also known as the *Straight A’s Act*, would have allowed states to receive ESEA funding in a block grant in exchange for accountability of schools for their students’ achievement. The idea was to give states flexibility in spending federal money. Some officials believed that the flexible spending would create in education the enthusiasm and creativity to bring about educational reform. The House passed the *Straight A’s Act*, but there was no action taken in the Senate (Yecke, 2004).

In 2001, the Bush administration proposed a reauthorization of ESEA which would have included the *Straight A’s plan*, including flexibility for the states meeting
accountability goals, but by the time ESEA was reauthorized in 2002, the state flexibility option was not included (Yecke, 2004).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) passed in 2001. It contained 700 pages as compared to the thirty-four pages from ESEA of 1965. The new law was driven by accountability and all states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia developed accountability plans that were approved by the U.S. Department of Education (Yecke, 2004). The NCLB Act has placed the accountability for student achievement at the local school level. Achievement standards have been established by mandate in every state and each individual school is responsible for educating all their students to meet rigorous standards regardless of socioeconomic or ethnic status (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

The Arkansas Department of Education has created a school accountability system that holds each individual school responsible for improving student achievement on state-administered assessments (Arkansas Department of Education, 2001). This type of accountability is unlike past practice when Arkansas school districts mandated the curriculum but had no responsibility to make sure all students were achieving at higher levels. This change in philosophy in terms of accountability is important because what happens at the school level can also have influence on student achievement (Marzano, 2003; Schmoker, 1999).

A goal of the NCLB Act is to ensure that all secondary students meet the standard set for their grade level or specific course. By the year 2014, 100 percent of all secondary school students are expected to achieve the standard set for proficiency for their grade level and/or course (Piccardi, 2005). In 2008, eleventh grade students in Arkansas had a
51 percent rate of achieving the standard in literacy (Arkansas Department of Education, 2008). In 2008, secondary students in Arkansas had a 66 percent rate of achieving the standard in algebra and a 60 percent rate of achieving the standard in geometry (Arkansas Department of Education, 2008).

These data would suggest that Arkansas must continue to look at changes in teaching and learning to ensure that no child is left behind. The need for change becomes more evident when the gap in the percentages of minority and poverty students at the secondary level is compared to overall state achievement. On the End-of-Course Literacy Exam, for example, the state of Arkansas had 51 percent of students meet the standard, but only 27 percent of African-American students, 49 percent of Hispanic students, and 34 percent of students with low income status met the standard (Arkansas Department of Education, 2008). While other variables may contribute to the students’ performance on exams, these data suggest that access, equity, and quality of instruction may be contributing factors as well. These data suggest that not all of Arkansas’s students are receiving the same access to quality instruction. Improving teaching must occur if there is to be improvement of student learning.

One of the most important factors in a student’s success may be effective teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Marzano, 2003). To the extent that effective teaching is an important factor in a student’s success, each school then has the responsibility to improve teacher effectiveness.

Teacher collaboration is one practice that has been identified as valuable concerning teacher effectiveness (Fullan, 1997; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). Evidence
suggests that teachers can better improve their instructional practice when they collaborate with their fellow teachers (Barth, 2001; Hord, 1999; Lambert, 1998).

In Arkansas, school principals are key leaders in school improvement efforts. Since they are held accountable for the effectiveness of their teachers, they must develop practices that produce teachers that are more effective. The need for more effective teachers, as evidenced by the low achievement of some students, would indicate that Arkansas principals must find ways to implement practices such as teacher collaboration in their schools.

Arkansas secondary school principals will play an important role in creating a school climate in which teachers can learn to be more collaborative and improve student achievement as a result of increased teacher collaboration. Leading collaborative work is a new role for secondary principals, since historically, principals have been managers of their schools rather than educational leaders who facilitate change (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

**Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this qualitative multi-case study is to describe the teacher collaboration process within secondary schools for practicing secondary principals in the Northwest Region of Arkansas. The reason schools exist is to educate students, helping them to develop the learning capacity and thinking skills necessary to become successful in the 21st century. The learning needs of today’s secondary school students are not being adequately addressed by the outdated traditional model of schools. Today’s students must be successful in the global community as opposed to earlier times when students learned skills that lasted a lifetime (Fitzgerald, 2005). Schools that support learning needs of the
21st century schools are schools that operate as professional learning communities which allow students to become learners for life. A key characteristic of the professional learning community is seen in the collaborative work of its members.

Research shows that increased learning for students is achieved when teachers work in collaboration (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). Conditions necessary for successful collaboration include a supportive environment, organizational structures which enable collaborative practices, communication, and the appropriate resources (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). These characteristics are consistent with the characteristics of the professional learning community.

In order to meet the perceived need for improved collaboration among secondary teachers, it is important to understand the nature of the barriers and facilitators, the factors affecting those barriers and facilitators, and what actions on the part of secondary school principals might influence improvement. Because secondary school principals have a broad perspective, and are the most significant impact on teacher collaboration (Fullan, 2001), determining how they perceive factors affecting teacher collaboration would be beneficial.

**Background**

Several strands of research and literature on teacher collaboration are relevant to this study. The implementation of effective, research-based methods and strategies, comprehensive design with aligned components, parental involvement, and professional development (U.S. Department of Education, 1998) are relevant factors relating to the research. When teachers collaborate on how to implement practices, how to show improvement in their practice, and how to engage the actual students in their classrooms,
these factors will have more impact on the learning of students. Teachers who choose to learn together through collaboration will have a greater impact on the success of these other important issues (Piccardi, 2005). Therefore, it was determined that this research would examine factors affecting teacher collaboration.

**Examining Teacher Collaboration**

In the past decade, there has been a consistent and growing body of research confirming the critical importance played by structured teacher collaboration and the removal of teacher isolation (Schmoker, 2006). The right kind of ongoing teacher collaboration improves the quality of teaching, significantly increases student achievement, and pays immediate dividends in the professional development of teachers. In high performing schools, one of the consistent characteristics of the success is teacher collaboration (Piccardi, 2005).

Professional development is essential in helping educators improve both their knowledge of the subjects they teach and the way they teach. When educators learn more about curriculum and instruction, students’ learning improves (Hirsh & Killion, 2007). To be effective, professional development must engage teachers collectively as active learners and be research based (US Department of Education, 2002, Teacher Quality Section). Research has shown that adults learn better when they are self-directed and when learning involves social relationships, as in teacher collaboration (Atherton, 2005).

The American Psychological Association (1997) agrees that learning can be enhanced when the learner has an opportunity to interact and collaborate with colleagues. An organization that is to become and remain effective must be a learning organization that supports collaboration as well as sharing knowledge and problem solving together on a
regular basis (Senge, 1990). Optimal teacher learning is not successful if the element of collaboration is not included.

**Importance of Professional Learning Communities for Teacher Learning**

Amid the school reform research is a recurring call for schools to interact as professional learning communities (Hord, 1999; Huffman, 2003). This study concentrated on the collaboration among and between teachers who improved their knowledge and skills together and as a result, student learning was improved. This is a teacher professional learning community.

Teacher learning has the potential to improve teaching. Therefore, it is important for teachers to be participating members in a professional learning community. Senge (1990) mentions that leadership that promotes deep change requires teachers to participate in a community of leaders. The teachers will benefit from the collaborative interaction, but more importantly, the students will benefit (Piccardi, 2005). Teachers must be engaged in effective professional learning and continuous improvement directly connected to student learning (Hirsh & Killion, 2007).

Lopez (2002) reports that teachers involved in a collaborative professional learning community experienced improved practice, demonstrating gains in practical teacher knowledge, an improvement in classroom practice and a development of camaraderie. Data from this qualitative study reported an increase in student interaction and productivity.

Even with dedicated, involved teachers, it takes the community of teachers learning together to affect student learning, contribute to school improvement, inspire
excellence in education, and empower other stakeholders to participate in educational improvement (Barth, 2001; Boyd & Hord, 1994; Gabriel, 2005).

Collaboration is one way to serve the professional development and learning needs of teachers. Teacher collaboration can be defined as teachers working together toward common goals to improve their collective and individual ability to educate students effectively (Piccardi, 2005).

Educational researcher Darling-Hammond (1998) identified several areas of knowledge that teachers need for instructional practice. She indicates that teachers not only need to know subject matter but also how to connect ideas across fields and life in general. Teachers must understand child development, including how to encourage students cognitively and affectively, how to understand differences in children’s cultures, and how to study student work. Additionally, Darling-Hammond points out the necessity for teachers to know about curriculum, student needs, collaboration among students and teachers, and how to involve parents to make the most supportive learning environment for students (Darling-Hammond). One way to keep up with these constantly changing demands is for teachers to continuously plan and work together to update their professional knowledge and practice (Lambert, 1998).

**Importance of Professional Learning Communities for Student Learning**

Those who have worked to improve education over the last decade have learned that success in any aspect of reform, including raising student achievement, depends on highly skilled teachers (US Department of Education, 1998). Teachers reflecting on their work together provides a deeper understanding of their teaching styles and ultimately, results in greater effectiveness of teachers to improve the learning of students (Ferraro,
Hord (1999) states that a professional learning community fosters the work of teachers who continue learning to improve their practice, thus improving student learning.

Researcher Little (1990) found that when teachers engage regularly in authentic “joint work” focused on explicit, common learning goals, their collaboration pays off in the form of high quality solutions to instructional problems, increased teacher confidence, and remarkable gains in student achievement.

The removal of teacher isolation in daily decision making regarding lesson plans, homework assignments, exam construction, grading practices, and effective teaching strategies is a primary factor in eliminating the inequities created by inconsistent rigor and lowered expectations for student performance by some teachers (Kanold, 2006).

Inger (1993) found that when schools were organized to support teacher collaboration, the benefits included improvements to student achievement, behavior, and attitudes. He inferred that students gain more consistency of expectations from teachers because of teacher collaboration.

Every student deserves to experience great teaching on a daily basis. Not surprisingly, there are schools in which some students experience exceptional teaching while those students next door or down the hall experience less than effective teaching. When educators collaborate, they have opportunities to share strengths and seek guidance from colleagues. When teachers collaborate to plan lessons and formative assessments, students in the same course benefit from the collective pool of knowledge of all the instructors of that course. In schools where collaboration among educators occurs on a
routine basis, effective teaching becomes a reality for all students (Hirsh & Killion, 2007).

Developing a professional learning community within a school has become more prevalent in an overall effort to contribute to the improvement of student achievement where teachers learn to teach better so that students learn better. Current educational researchers contend that schools functioning as professional learning communities prove the best chance for school improvement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

**The Role of Teacher Collaboration in Professional Learning Communities**

Boyd and Hord (1994) reported on case studies of highly effective schools that were described as professional learning communities. The researchers listed vision, relationships, empowerment, and academic focus as conditions present in effective schools with professional learning communities; collaboration was listed as the central component that these conditions were dependent upon.

Educators who are building a professional learning community recognize that they must work together to achieve their collective purpose of learning for all. Therefore, they create a process to promote a collaborative culture. The powerful collaboration that characterizes professional learning communities is a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice. Teachers work in teams, engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning. This process, in turn, leads to higher levels of student achievement (DuFour, 2004).

Teacher collaboration is the dominant feature of a professional learning community, and the demonstration of a school culture that values learning (Cotton, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Lambert, 1998). Teacher collaboration is valued and nourished
in a school that has the culture of a professional learning community. Collaboration is the activity that facilitates the learning of teachers and, in turn, students (Hord, 1999).

Joyce & Showers (2002) found that professional development workshops resulted in more teachers learning when collaboration was included. In their research, teachers had the opportunity to practice new learning and get feedback from their peers. This model, which combined the use of a workshop with teacher collaboration, was more effective than the workshop alone. Practicing to give feedback on new learning is one of the most important professional development opportunities for teachers to engage in. This skill may be learned in a coaching model. Barkley (2005) relates coaching as a relationship between two equals, one of whom is committed to making personal and professional improvements. When administrators and teachers together undertake a coaching program, it gets even better. School wide collegial support develops and a collaborative culture is enriched.

Inger (1993) found that teachers working collaboratively were more adaptable, self-reliant, and energetic, with more organizational skills and more resources to attempt innovations. Teachers found collaboration made complex tasks more manageable, stimulated new ideas, and promoted more coherence in curriculum and instruction (Inger). Collaboration codifies best practices and institutionalization of those best practices increases when collaboration is sustained. Best practices become better practices when teams, rather than individuals, analyze the practices after implementation. When this occurs, information transfers across classrooms and across schools as well. People get better as they work collaboratively rather than individuals excelling at the cost of other colleagues (Hirsh & Killion, 2007).
Largely, however, the research suggests that teacher collaboration in secondary schools is a departure from existing norms, and, in most schools, teachers are colleagues in name only (Inger, 1993). Teacher collaboration is not practiced on a large scale throughout American public schools (Resnick & Glennan, 2002). Patterns of teaching in isolation have been established in schools, and school leaders are expected to change those patterns in order to increase student achievement (Inger).

**The Role of Principal in Facilitating Teacher Collaboration**

Great principals must understand that the road to success in student achievement begins with a culture that includes strong, supportive relationships. The principal must have many conversations and listen attentively to many people as he or she begins the long, arduous process of building trust, which leads to supportive relationships. For deep change to occur and for transformational learning, the principals must provide a school climate that allows for open communication and make it possible for the unknown to be shared for the good of the team. This culture of deep trust allows all members of a community to perform at their best (Hirsh & Killion, 2007).

According to Whitaker (2003), the principal is the key figure in facilitating any movement in a school and facilitating collaboration would not be an exception. Whitaker has provided great insight into building a collaborative culture. Whitaker wanted it to be a high priority to care in his school and he wanted everyone including students, teachers, staff members, and all parents to think it should always be a high priority to care as well because a culture of caring impacts student achievement positively. As relationships and bonds become stronger in a professional sense, the culture begins to take on a “professional learning community” atmosphere where learning together becomes
commonplace. What starts with building relationships evolves into a culture where there is a shared mission, shared vision, shared values and goals; where collective inquiry is an everyday activity; where collaborative teams are developed; where actions takes the place of shallow talk and fantasy; where continuous improvement is the norm; and where assessment of improvement really is based on the results (DuFour, 1998; Schmoker, 2006).

Principals are in a strategic position to work through the obstacles that prevent the practice of teacher collaboration in their schools and to implement strategies that will support efforts of teachers to collaborate. Examples of exemplary secondary schools can help secondary principals observe successful practices of collaborative learning environments. These exemplary schools can share strategies they used to overcome the obstacles that impeded collaboration among the teaching staff (DuFour, 1998).

Exemplary schools have principals and other leaders who support a culture of collaboration that provides opportunities on a regular basis where ideas are shared and teachers have time to reflect on their work (Whitaker, 2003). Inger (1994) has told us that teachers improve teaching and students improve in achievement, behavior, and attitude when schools support teacher collaboration.

The principal should have total responsibility for his or her school and should be the most significant facilitator of teacher collaboration. A National Association of Secondary Schools study (Valentine, Goodman, Matthews, Klinginsmith & Mees, 2008) reports that principals must build a school culture that includes collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, collegial support and learning partnerships. Principals are expected to lead and coordinate the effort as well as
implement conditions to improve the achievement of every student. Without principal leadership, little change in the way teachers learn will occur. Teacher collaboration is a crucial component of the leadership role principals must utilize in developing a cohesive group of teaching professionals to change the way teachers learn and create an environment that improves student achievement (Whitaker, 2003).

Secondary principals must consider the value of teacher collaboration as they work to improve their schools. Principals must understand what it is, how it is practiced in schools, and how they might encourage and support it.

**Building Capacity for Teacher Collaboration**

DuFour (1998) is one expert on professional learning communities. He believes that creating a collaborative environment is the single most important factor for successful school improvement initiatives, and the first order of business for those seeking to enhance the effectiveness of their schools. However, before teacher collaboration can be implemented and strengthened in secondary schools, it is necessary to assess the current state of its practice. Only after a thorough needs analysis can the practice of teacher collaboration begin to be transformed to an optimal state. To develop such a transformation, secondary principals must be clear about what capacities are needed, determine the extent to which their schools have those capacities, and develop plans to increase capacity where it is found to be lacking.

Fullan (2001) has developed a comprehensive framework for leadership. He believes that building capacity in people is necessary if leaders are to implement change efforts successfully. Moving from an isolated teaching environment in secondary schools to a collaborative environment would certainly require discovering, exploring, adopting,
and implementing ideas and strategies that have successfully developed leadership capacity in others.

Leaders must accept responsibility for building the capacity of individuals, teams, and organizations to be leaders and learners. For change to occur, those engaged in change must be provided with the skills, support, and opportunities to learn if they are to be successful. As leadership capacity is developed throughout the school community, individuals and teams make good decisions and take more initiative. All members of the professional learning community begin to share in both accountability and responsibility for the success of the school. Success of school leadership begins to be measured by results and the ability to build leadership capacity in others within the school organization (Hirsh & Killion, 2007).

To build capacity for improving teacher collaboration, secondary principals must clarify their understandings of the factors that prevent teacher collaboration, and those factors that encourage teacher collaboration. Secondary principals must know what factors affect teacher collaboration, how they might address them, and what assistance they might need to accomplish their plans. Administrative support for shared learning is essential (Martin, 2008).

**Research Questions**

**Central Question**

How do various practicing secondary principals in the Northwest Region of Arkansas perceive the teacher collaboration process within secondary schools?
Subquestions

- How did the process unfold?
- What were the major events in the process?
- What were the barriers to change in the process?
- Who were the important participants? How did they participate in the process?
- How were the program participants (teachers) changed by the process? How were non-program participants (teachers, staff, administrators, etc.) changed by the process?
- What strategies did secondary principals use to support the process?
- What training and professional development did secondary principals use to improve the process?
- What were outcomes from the process for school personnel and students?

Description of Terms

**Common Planning Time.** A block of time during which secondary teachers of the same content area or with the same instructional goals discuss the needs of students, engage in embedded professional development, and plan lessons or units of study together.

**Factor.** Piccardi (2005) defined a factor as an element such as an action, event, or condition that could contribute to a result.
Professional Learning Community. A school that shows the following characteristics: shared mission, vision, and values; collective inquiry; collaborative teams; action orientation and experimentation; continuous improvement; results oriented (DuFour, 1998).

School Climate. “School Climate is a reflection of the physical and psychological aspects of the school that are more susceptible to change and that provide the preconditions necessary for teaching and learning to take place” (Tableman, 2004b, p. 2).

School Culture. “School Culture is a reflection of the shared ideas—assumptions, values, and beliefs—that give an organization its identity and standard for expected behaviors” (Tableman, 2004a, p. 1).

Secondary School. In this study secondary school is a term to describe an educational institution which houses students after their primary or elementary education which could contain any combination of grades 7-12 but traditionally represent grades 9-12.

Teacher Collaboration. Teacher collaboration is a style of direct interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal (Friend & Cook, 1992).

Significance

This study sought to expand the knowledge base regarding teacher collaboration as an effective way to improve teacher performance and concurrently improve student achievement. It is possible to locate schools performing at an exemplary level where teacher collaboration exists in the form of professional learning communities. There is a great need to find information that is presently lacking regarding how to replicate these
same exemplary best practices in other secondary schools. This research acknowledged that principal leadership is vital to enhance collaborative behavior among teachers and replicate exemplary practices.

Many factors influence whether the culture and climate of a school are conducive to collaboration among secondary teachers. This study focused on what principals perceive to be important school characteristics for secondary school leaders to have in place that will create and enhance the opportunities for teacher collaboration.

In order to understand how to promote a collaborative climate, it is crucial to discover the barriers to collaboration. Principals that hampered moving their schools to a more collaborative environment identified barriers. The barriers described are to be shared with colleagues and policy makers if improvements are to be made in other secondary schools.

In the process of this study on factors affecting secondary teacher collaboration, successful leadership strategies were identified that will support school leaders in their effort to build a collaborative culture in their school. The fundamental process of building leadership capacity among teachers and principals was researched to add to the body of knowledge regarding the relationship of teacher collaboration to an improved school culture. This increased body of knowledge concerning teacher collaboration creates potential for improved school leadership and enhanced opportunities for success for both students and teachers at other secondary schools.

One practical application of this study was identifying the training and support that principals and other school leaders need to confront the challenge, and possibly the hostility, in developing a collaborative culture in the secondary school workplace. Noting
the presence of needs and identifying how to meet these needs of the principal and other school leaders will build leadership capacity. Leadership capacities such as broad-based, skillful participation and established norms of collaboration must be expanded in individual school leaders in order to move secondary teachers from the comfort of the isolated classroom into a collaborative professional learning community that enhances student achievement (Lambert, 1998).

The research findings of this study provided additional information regarding how principals and teachers can lead their schools to more collaborative practice with the ultimate goal of student achievement increasing for all students. In the future, other secondary education researchers may build on this information to help secondary educators further improve the available information concerning factors that affect secondary teacher collaboration.

**Process to Accomplish**

**Design**

The design of this research was a qualitative multi-case study that explored and described the experiences of secondary school principals in the northwest region of Arkansas. “Qualitative researchers tend to rely on the inductive model of the scientific method, and the major objective of this type of research is exploration or discovery” (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). This research explored and discovered the perceptions of secondary school principals concerning teacher collaboration. In this study principals described their experiences by citing and explaining factors affecting teacher collaboration in their schools.
Qualitative multi-case study research was the best design for the researcher to interact with informants, gain information, and find patterns emerging from the study. The study explored multiple cases of principals’ perceptions and practices rather than quantifying or looking for causal reasoning. The researcher attempted to understand and describe how one or more individuals (principals) perceive teacher collaboration. A qualitative study, specifically a qualitative multi-case study was appropriate for this research study.

**Sample**

The researcher chose a purposive sample of 15-20 secondary school principals from the Northwest Region of Arkansas. The researcher used a blend of intensity sampling, also called maximal variation and random purposive sampling in the selection of informants. The purposive sample of rich sources of data was useful in understanding the concepts of teacher collaboration from the participants’ points of view. In this study, the researcher did not try to generalize to a larger population.

Participants throughout the Northwest Region of Arkansas were contacted by telephone and those willing to participate were sent a follow-up letter of acceptance into the study. Focus groups were formed and each group was asked the same open-ended questions as is standard practice in qualitative research.

The participants chosen were secondary principals and had similar characteristics including knowledge, experience, and a perceptual feeling about teacher collaboration that provided a connection to the topic of the focus group. The perspective of the secondary principals provided insight into the achieved successes and challenges faced in the implementation of teacher collaboration. The principals also had the leadership skills
and professional development knowledge to support the improvement of teacher collaboration. These principals were the “informants” as the study was conducted.

**Instrumentation**

The researcher obtained data from three focus groups by conducting interviews and interactive discussions. The researcher facilitated the focus groups. The researcher’s role as moderator was the primary instrument for collecting data, an appropriate instrument according to Creswell (1994). The questions were asked to the participants (informants). As the questions were answered, the researcher subjectively made judgments about the information worth noting and made field notes both during and after the interview. The researcher used technology to video and audio record the focus group interviews and had the verbal responses transcribed for analysis.

The researcher designed a moderator’s guide for the desired and necessary purpose of including all questions and sequencing them in proper order (Piccardi, 2005). The open-ended questions were used to address the research questions and moved from general to more specific. The guide was used to keep the researcher focused, keep things flowing, and provide consistency as the researcher moved from one focus group to another.

As the researcher conducted the focus groups, a uniform understanding of the concepts of teacher collaboration as well as barriers to collaboration and facilitators of teacher collaboration existed within the group. The researcher looked at many pieces of literature that showed examples of how teacher collaboration is impacted by various conditions. Teacher behaviors that define and demonstrate dimensions of teacher collaboration, such as examining student work together and engaging in peer coaching,
were put on a checklist for the participants. Another essential checklist noted either barriers or facilitators of collaboration such as the degree of personality conflicts among teachers or the amount of time the principal devotes to collaboration. These lists developed a framework of discussion of teacher collaboration among the focus group (Piccardi, 2005).

Content validity was established in focus groups by making sure informants were asked for clarification of their comments, for verification of summaries by the researcher, and for additional areas of discussion they thought should have been included. As a moderator, the researcher documented any comments from informants that they expressed which questioned the relevancy of the questions.

The researcher contacted possible focus group participants (informants) and sent a written agreement form for those that accepted. The researcher audio and video recorded all the focus group interviews, uncovered emergent themes and then organized data for analysis. The researcher had five to six principal participants in each focus group with a total of three focus groups. The researcher planned for 15-20 total participants in order to accommodate absences or no-shows. The researcher provided a comfortable setting for the interviews and modeled a comfortable, conversational type of discussion as questions were asked.

A number of open-ended questions were asked from the moderator’s guide and each connected to one of the original research questions. The moderator attempted to make everyone comfortable with the audio and video recording devices that were used. The moderator moved from one question to the next when everyone was given the opportunity to discuss and explain their points of view regarding each question. The job
of moderator was not to agree or disagree with any of the comments. At the end of each focus group, the moderator summarized and asked for any clarification and verification of comments. The audio and video recordings, the notes taken during the focus group discussions, and the later transcript were the data collected from the focus groups.

**Data Analysis**

The researcher took copious field notes during the focus group interviews to reflect the responses of participants accurately, and after the discussions to ascertain emergent themes. The reviewed field notes as well as the transcripts of the discussions added to the understanding of the participants’ comments. Recordings were reviewed and data from the recordings, as well as field notes and transcripts, were analyzed and organized by emergent themes in a written document. Data must be selected, focused, simplified, abstracted, and transformed (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The research questions for the study directed the analysis. The researcher analyzed all information by arranging it and looking for recurring themes surrounding the research questions. This process found emergent categories that described secondary school principals’ perceptions of factors affecting teacher collaboration. As a researcher, it was important to be descriptive in the narrative regarding the secondary principals’ perceptions of factors affecting the teacher collaboration process.

The researcher created a table containing a matrix display to develop a correspondence between research questions and focus group questions. All data explanation and descriptions were organized to relate results of the original research questions as displayed in this matrix.
The findings of this study were based on an analysis of the data provided by the principals who participated. A discovery was made of how secondary principals perceive and influence factors that affect teacher collaboration, what strategies are needed, and what professional development support them in providing a more positive influence on developing a collaborative environment.

The researcher shared the results of this study with participants in the hope that secondary principals would find the results helpful as they develop teacher collaboration in their schools. Bogdan and Bilken (2007) express that sometimes the research process itself may improve the situation and results of a study can help define what stands between what exists and what one would like it to be. Teacher collaboration was supported by research as an important method of improving teacher performance and ultimately improving student achievement. Although there is much research to be done, as the study concluded, it was helpful to confirm the findings in the general knowledge base on the topic of teacher collaboration.

All of the results revert to the original research questions and connect to the purpose of the qualitative multi-case study that was to describe the teacher collaboration process within secondary schools for practicing secondary principals in the Northwest Region of Arkansas.

Suggestions for further studies could include surveying a larger sample of principals, including a focus group of teachers to study their perceptions of their own teacher collaboration, or conducting a focus group of higher education professors to study their perceptions of how higher education prepares teachers for collaborative work. It will be interesting to follow the process and practice of teacher collaboration to search for
both qualitative and quantitative studies that may support the concept of teacher collaboration in secondary schools.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The professional learning community values teacher collaboration as a vital component of an effective educational system. It stands in opposition to teacher isolation prevalent in the traditional models of secondary schools today (Fitzgerald, 2005). A review of the relevant educational literature provides a framework for this study of teacher collaboration in the professional learning community.

In the world of secondary education, autonomy is a much desired teacher expectation (Inger, 1993). Research suggests that even though autonomy is desired, the result is isolation that leads to teacher burnout (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Giving assistance to educators that are burning out and losing enthusiasm was a goal of this project, and research was conducted to support the belief that collaboration will reduce this burnout and other frustrations that are a result of working in isolation. Research further suggests that working in isolation contributes to a negative attitude found in many schools among educators, while developing a collaborative work environment in secondary schools enriches and extends the careers of many that have chosen secondary education as their career (Fitzgerald, 2005). When teachers are enriched, supported, and energized, students find their experiences in the teachers’ classrooms more motivational (Reeves & Allison, 2009).
Although there are many teachers that may like the isolation, there are many others who may very well desire to work more collaboratively and would be very open to the effort to remove isolation, as well as improve their teaching (Inger, 1993). The problem becomes an issue of who will take the time and put forth the effort to break the isolation and get teachers working together to prepare the students for the collaborative and global approach that exists in the present world?

Many educational reforms are being discussed, and teacher collaboration is a part of this discussion. It becomes a complex issue, and educational research involving many areas of school reform and the change that enhances teacher collaboration must be investigated. Research in this study will include an examination of what collaboration actually means in the context of the professional learning community, the importance of relationships as the underpinning for the successful implementation of teacher collaboration, best practices and behaviors of principals and teachers, professional development, and the cultures of successful and unsuccessful schools. Both the barriers that prevent successful teacher collaboration as well as the benefits gained from the implementation of effective teacher collaboration must be examined if we are to identify and replicate successful models. The process of change must also be considered, because for any change to occur, in terms of moving away from teaching in isolation in secondary schools to a collaborative effort, findings must be examined to determine how practices have been changed in schools and how to support those individuals who would desire to make a change.

Educational researcher Darling-Hammond (1998) identified several areas of knowledge that teachers need to know for today’s instruction. Teachers need to not only
know subject matter, but also must know how to connect ideas across fields and life in
general. Teachers must understand child development and how to encourage students
cognitively and affectively, how to understand differences in children’s cultures, and how
to study student work. Additionally, Darling-Hammond points out the necessity for
teachers to know about curriculum, student needs, collaboration among students and
teachers, and about how to involve parents to make the most supportive learning
environment for students. She would agree with this statement: “To keep up with these
continuously changing demands, teachers need to update their professional knowledge and
practice continuously (Piccardi, 2005, p. 21).

Collaboration is one way to serve the professional development and life long
learning of teachers dedicated to improving their craft. Teacher collaboration can be
defined as teachers working together toward the same goals to improve their collective
and individual abilities to educate students effectively (Piccardi, 2005). Building a culture
where there is a shared mission, shared values and goals, where collective inquiry is an
every day activity, where collaborative teams are developed, where action takes the place
of dreaming, where continuous improvement is the theme, and where assessment of
improvement is based on results, is the desired culture of a secondary school (DuFour,
1998). If teacher collaboration should be practiced, and the practice of collaboration
improves teacher skills and student performance, why is it not being done on a large-
scale in secondary schools?

Teachers and principals face many demands, and support must be there for those
willing to lead their schools to higher student achievement through a concentrated effort
of teacher collaboration. The major themes discussed above are analyzed in more detail below and create the scaffolding upon which this study was framed.

**Professional Learning Communities**

Current professional literature is rich with references to the professional learning community and its importance in school improvement efforts. DuFour and Eaker (1998) indicated in their research that the most promising strategy for sustained and substantive school improvement was developing the ability of school personnel to function as a professional learning community. Hargreaves (2003) established that professional learning communities promote shared learning and improvement by bringing together the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of teachers in a school. Professional learning communities advocate and support attributes such as teamwork, inquiry, and continuous learning. In professional learning communities, teachers support each other in exploring new pedagogies, curriculum development, and other technologies that are important for 21st century learners (Fitzgerald, 2005).

Little (1982) writes about a collaborative school model, where administrators and teachers work together to promote teaching and learning. In Little’s (1999) updated description of the collaborative school, teachers talk about their practice, observe one another, and provide each other with feedback. Teachers work together in developing lessons and teaching materials. This is a process of teaching each other to teach. Little’s collaborative school model exemplifies the professional learning community.

As the school culture becomes more collaborative, leadership must be distributed. There is just not enough time in the day for the principal to make every decision and have every conversation. For many reasons, not the least being high stakes testing, teacher
leadership becomes a necessity in the school moving to a collaborative culture. Gabriel (2005) suggests that inviting teachers to participate in the decision-making process by elevating them to leadership roles should be viewed as a means to accomplish significant change in the field of education. “Teacher leaders can affect student learning; contribute to school improvement; inspire excellence in practice; and empower stakeholders to participate in educational improvement” (p.156). Of all the variables that influence student achievement, the two that have the most profound influence are teacher quality and leadership (Reeves, 2009).

Even with teachers involved, it takes more than individual teachers learning new things to bring about improvement. In the professional learning community, the commitment to work together is so strong that the individualism of teachers is replaced by teacher collaboration. Improving student achievement by improving teacher quality takes the community of teachers learning together (Barth, 2001; Boyd & Hord, 1994). Boyd and Hord reported on case studies of highly effective schools that were described as having professional learning communities. The researchers listed professional learning communities and collaboration as the central components present in effective schools, with vision, relationships, empowerment, and academic focus as necessary conditions for success. DuFour (1998), a prominent expert on professional learning communities, thinks that creating a collaborative environment is the single most important factor for successful school improvement initiatives, and the first order of business for those seeking to enhance the effectiveness of their schools. These groups must be high performance teams that focus on essential questions of teaching and learning.
To function as a professional learning community is to share a vision, mission, and goals with the group. Collective inquiry and collaborative teams would be the norm, according to DuFour (1998). The main focus is on continuous improvement and and a refusal to accept the status quo. Leaders in a professional learning community will be results-driven leaders.

**Teacher Collaboration**

The operational definition of teacher collaboration that will guide this study is DuFour’s (2003) definition that focuses on student learning. Collaboration is the systemic process in which teachers work together to analyze and affect professional practice in order to improve individual and collective results regarding raising student achievement. The paraphrased definition suggests that a systemic collaborative effort is an embedded approach at improving routine practices, while professional practice would be the ongoing effort of teachers to identify more effective ways to help students learn. In this concept of teacher collaboration, the effectiveness of the collaborative process is assessed on results rather than on perceptions, projects or positive intentions.

The highly qualified teacher mandate of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has increased stress and pressure on today’s teachers. Properly supported collaboration can help to address these challenges and difficulties (Fitzgerald, 2005). Hargreaves (1994) suggests that the principle of collaboration has repeatedly emerged as a productive response to a world in which problems are unpredictable, solutions are unclear, and expectations are intensifying. In this context, teacher collaboration has been proposed as a solution to many of the challenges and difficulties teachers face.
In the 1996 publication, *What Matters Most: Teaching for America’s Future*, the National Commission of Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF) made the point that the quality of teaching is the issue that mattered most in improving what students learn. The commission recommended that schools be organized as professional learning communities where teachers would be provided with regularly scheduled time for collegial work and planning (Fitzgerald, 2005). It was recognized that providing opportunities for teachers to work together improves the quality of teachers, thus improving student learning. It was also recognized that professional learning communities are difficult to implement. The commission cites a direct relationship between low teacher retention rates in public schools and the lack of teacher collaboration (NCTAF, 2002). The missing ingredient in teacher retention is suggested to be finding a way for school systems to organize the work of qualified teachers so they can collaborate with colleagues in developing strong professional learning communities that will sustain them as they become more accomplished teachers, (NCTAF).

Researchers credit collaboration as one of the most important factors in successful school restructuring (Fitzgerald, 2005). In their research on this topic, Newmann and Wehlage (1995) found that a professional collaborative culture is one of the most relevant and significant factors in successful school improvement efforts. Eastwood and Louis (1992) cite that a collaborative environment that is centered on cooperative problem solving is the single most important factor in school restructuring. Likewise, Little (1990) links effective collaboration between teachers to increased student achievement and a higher self-worth among faculty.
The practice of collaboration is evident in schools where teachers share instructional strategies, make decisions together about their instructional practices and educational issues, research and examine new educational methodologies, and develop new ideas based on research that will enhance student learning (Fitzgerald, 2005). The goal of teacher collaboration is improved student learning. A properly supported teacher group that focuses on assessing and evaluating student work is an example of real collaboration (Little, Gearhart, Curry, & Kafta, 2003). Although it is recognized that teachers regularly examine and evaluate student work as a part of their profession, Little et al. noted that the practice described by researchers as “looking at student work” involves bringing teachers to do collectively what they generally do alone. Looking at student work as a collaborative effort has more potential for improving student achievement than looking at the work in isolation (Reeves, 2009).

Possibly the best explanation of what effective collaboration in schools should look like is found in Little’s (1990) description of joint-work. Little describes joint-work as encounters among teachers that depend on shared responsibility for the work of teaching, support for teachers’ initiative and leadership with regard to professional practice, and group relationships formed around professional work. In joint-work, teachers are motivated to participate with one another to the point that they require each other’s contributions in order to succeed in their work. Little notes that teachers engaged in joint-work favor thoughtful, explicit examination of practices and their consequences. Teachers are able to discuss the moral, intellectual, and technical merit of classroom practices, programs, and policies. They accept and expect initiative on matters of
principle and their craft when it is needed. Student achievement is improved because everyone takes responsibility for improved professional practice.

McCann and Radford (1993) address the importance of collaboration and teamwork among school staff and between staff and administrators. Teachers are the most valued resource in the teaching profession. Good principals recognize that teachers not only need to be acknowledged for their talents, skills, and abilities, but also must be allowed and encouraged to share these valuable resources with colleagues. The celebration of achievements is important in providing teachers with encouragement and recognition. McCann and Radford noted ways of sharing and celebrating achievements before a wider school audience should be a practice of all caring principals working in a collaborative culture.

Hargreaves (1994) noted that in the context of educational improvement, collaboration embodies the principles of moral support, increased efficiency, improved effectiveness, reduced overload, synchronized time perspectives, certainty of professional competence, political assertiveness, increased capacity for reflection, organizational responsiveness, opportunities to learn, and continuous improvement. The principle of teacher collaboration is a productive tool in an educational setting where students must learn to be problem solvers and find solutions that are not readily available. According to Fullan and Hargreaves (1996), effective collaboration operates in the world of ideas, examining existing practices critically, seeking better alternatives and working hard together at bringing about improvement and assessing their worth.

Initially, teachers may hesitate to engage in collaborative work, but McCann and Radford (1993) indicated that teachers involved in collaboration with their colleagues
reported positive personal benefits from collaboration, noting surprise at the extent of the success of collaboration. They report experiencing professional fulfillment, surprise, and success during the learning process when working collaboratively. Teachers indicated that collaboration improved their communication skills, gave them a sharper focus in their work, increased the amount of time they spent reflecting on their work, enhanced their self esteem and confidence in their teaching abilities, and motivated them to take more risks by attempting new teaching strategies. Teachers also reported gaining sharper observational skills, improved classroom management skills, increased ability to help students become active learners, improved questioning skills and group techniques, increased use of technological devices such as computers, and a positive change in student/teacher relations.

In summary, the practice of collaboration is evident in schools where teachers share instructional strategies, make decisions together about instructional practices and educational issues, research and examine new educational methodologies, and develop new ideas based on research that will enhance student learning. The collaborative group’s main purpose is to discover innovative teaching strategies and pursue excellence, which enhances opportunities for improvement in student achievement (Fitzgerald, 2005).

**Relationships**

Building caring relationships is essential to the success of a school’s collaborative efforts. Bruce, Calhoun, and Hopkins (1999) suggest that building relationships in which teachers mutually and willingly work to support the success of each other will increase feelings of belonging and reduce the stress of isolation. This may be a more complex task than it seems. Building sustained and effective professional relationships will remain
complex and difficult as long as the dual issues of lack of time and the isolation of teachers are not addressed (Fitzgerald, 2005).

Research supports the premise that, in most American schools, teachers teach lessons in classrooms alone with their students, with little or no professional interaction with their colleagues. Many teachers are content with this way of working; thus the thought of opening their doors to share strategies and ideas with their colleagues may feel uncomfortable to them. Some teachers may even find the prospect threatening (Fitzgerald, 2005). To overcome this fear of becoming collaborative, it is extremely important that time is taken to develop relationships that are conducive to this way of working. Hargreaves (1994) suggests that collaboration must be enjoyable and rewarding to teachers, and staff relationships must become the foundation for true teacher collaboration. If teachers feel that they are part of a caring group, it is more likely that they will be involved in collaborative practices. DuFour & Eaker (1998) suggest that schools must resolve to create a culture where people care for each other and make extraordinary efforts to help each other. It can be concluded that the development of strong relationships among the group is one of the first steps in creating the environment for successful collaboration to succeed.

The establishment of trust is another step in creating a collaborative environment. Covey (2006) describes trust as confidence in people’s integrity and abilities. Principals and teachers must show confidence in one another as they develop a collaborative culture. Hargreaves (1994) indicates that trust is a keystone in building relationships conducive to collaboration. Bryk and Schneider (2002) cite trust as central to the relationships that make schools work. They refer to relational trust as the connective
tissue of improving schools and further suggest a connection between relational trust of teachers and student achievement. They indicate that relational trust facilitates the development of beliefs, values, individual behaviors, and organizational routines that affect students’ engagement and learning.

School cultures with a high level of trust were more likely to make improvements over time than those that possessed low trust levels. Bryk and Schneider (2002) conclude that the quality of the relationships in schools largely determines whether or not reform efforts will succeed. They argue on the necessity of relational trust and its importance in building relationships that foster professional learning communities so as to diffuse reform initiatives across the school. Trust is seen as a keystone in the development of healthy staff relationships and is emphasized as important in building relationships that foster professional learning communities (Fitzgerald, 2005). The trust embedded in the culture reduces the sense of risk associated with change. When school professionals trust one another, they feel safe to experiment with new practices. They are more likely to learn from one another in a safe environment (Bryk & Schneider).

Great principals also understand that the road to success in student achievement begins with strong, supportive relationships. The principal must have many conversations and listen attentively to many people as he/she begins the long, arduous process of building the sort of trust that leads to supportive relationships. As relationships and bonds become stronger in a professional sense, the culture begins to take on a professional learning community atmosphere where learning together becomes commonplace. What started with building relationships evolves into a culture where the mission, values, and goals are shared; where collective inquiry is an everyday activity; where collaborative
teams are developed; where action takes the place of dreaming; where continuous improvement is the theme; and where evaluation of the improvement is based on results (DuFour, 1998). The development and fostering of healthy staff relationships is seen as integral to the success of teacher collaboration initiatives (DuFour & Eaker; Hargreaves, 1994).

Finding job-embedded time for teachers to work together, building trusting relationships, and providing the structures for collaborative work will help to move the practice of teaching from isolation to collaboration (Fitzgerald, 2005). Little (1987) suggests that the accomplishments of a proficient and well-organized group are considered to be greater than the accomplishments of isolated individuals. Research shows that collaboration, developed as a result of positive relationships in the context of the professional learning community, offers educators an opportunity to make schools more engaging for students (Fitzgerald).

**Benefits of Teacher Collaboration**

Benefits of effective teacher collaboration in secondary schools can be documented in many ways. Through formal and informal training sessions, study groups, and conversations about teaching, teachers and administrators get the opportunity to learn together. Teachers are better prepared to support one another’s strengths and weaknesses. Working together, they may reduce their individual planning time but stand to greatly increase the available pool of ideas and materials. Schools become better prepared and organized to examine new ideas, methods, and materials. The faculty becomes adaptable and self-reliant. Teachers are organized to ease the strain of staff turnover, both by providing systematic professional assistance to beginners and by explicitly socializing all
newcomers, including veteran teachers, to staff values, traditions, and resources (Inger, 1993).

Teachers who have worked together see substantive improvements in student achievement, behavior, and attitude. Teachers in a junior high school traced their students’ remarkable gains in math achievement and the elimination of many classroom behavior problems to the revisions in curriculum, testing, and placement procedures they had achieved working as a group. In schools where teachers work collaboratively, students can sense the program coherence and a consistency of expectations, which could explain the improved student achievement and behavior (Inger, 1993).

In a case study by Lopez (2002), teachers found that daily discussions of classroom work with their peers aided them in learning new practices. These teachers found that such collaboration helped them institute new practices discovered in the daily discussions. They experienced improvement as teachers and reported a more productive learning environment for their students. This research would suggest that school improvement is enhanced with the aid of teacher collaboration (Piccardi, 2005).

For teachers, collegiality breaks the isolation of the classroom and produces career rewards as well as a daily satisfaction in their work. It avoids the sink-or-swim, trial-and-error mode that beginning teachers usually experience. It brings experienced and beginning teachers closer together to reinforce confidence in beginning teachers. It prevents end-of-year burnout and stimulates enthusiasm. Instead of searching for isolated and dramatic achievements of only a few students as their main source of pride, teachers are more apt to detect and celebrate a pattern of accomplishments within and across classrooms (Little, 1987). Teachers who work closely together on matters of curriculum
and instruction find themselves better equipped for classroom work. They take considerable satisfaction from professional relationships that withstand differences in viewpoints and occasional conflict (Inger, 1993).

Research by Morrissey, Cowan, Leo & Blair (1999) described benefits of four high schools that were committed to effective teacher collaboration. The teachers at these schools participated in embedded professional development both as a whole staff and as grade-level and cross-curricular groups. They had on-going, applied, and embedded opportunities to problem-solve around areas of concern, and time to reflect on their practice, both as individuals and as a collaborative team. The teachers also shared their instructional materials and sought advice and opinions from each other. The conclusion was reached that teachers can become more proficient through collaboration. This research also reasoned that teachers were better equipped to make informed decisions, which in turn would increase student learning. It was inferred that the collaboration of the teachers supported school improvement. Understanding the factors that affect this process of teacher collaboration and the benefits received from such is essential if we are to replicate such success (Piccardi, 2005).

The complexities of a new curriculum, or even the need to refine an existing one, are challenging and possibly even threatening to some. Teacher teamwork makes these complex tasks more doable, stimulates new ideas on how to accomplish the tasks, and promotes coherence in a school’s curriculum and instruction. Together, teachers have the necessary organizational skills and combined resources to take on innovations that would normally exhaust the energy, skill, or resources of an individual teacher. The
accomplishments of a proficient and well-organized group are widely believed to be greater than the accomplishments of isolated individuals (Little, 1987).

As the research indicates, the benefit of teacher collaboration is not obtained by one particular behavior on the part of teachers. Teacher collaboration takes on many forms and is practiced in many ways (Piccardi, 2005). For the purposes of this study, recurring dimensions of teacher behavior that produce benefits as teachers work collaboratively have been produced from the research and placed as descriptors in Appendix B.

**Professional Development**

While the goal of professional development is the improvement of teacher quality, the traditional methods of obtaining professional development have not proved adequate (Hord, 1999). Better teaching is more complex than just going to a workshop to seek new learning. The complexity of showing improvement for every child demands far more than simply attending workshops. For example, teachers need new strategies to meet the challenges of today’s standards and accountability (Piccardi, 2005). Reeves (2004) notes that teachers must be responsible for assessment of student writing, frequent collaborative scoring of student work, agreement on the scoring of anonymous student work, the integration of technology, consensus in the use of scoring rubrics, across the curriculum writing, frequent feedback to students resulting in students taking action on the feedback, development of student portfolios, and student reading assessment. In order to be prepared for teaching in such a complex, multi-faceted context, teachers require powerful professional development learning experiences, and such professional development is vital for teaching in secondary schools.
In the past, it has been presumed that attending workshops or in-service programs would supply teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to make appropriate changes in their classrooms. While it is always wise to seek opportunities for teacher learning, certain conditions can make professional development workshops either valuable or virtually worthless.

Poor examples of professional development include those that fail to consider how different teachers learn, focus on irrelevant topics, or fail to motivate, or ignore teacher input. Such workshops and in-service programs that ignore the teachers’ needs will have minimal benefits (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). It had once been assumed that teachers would obtain and improve the necessary skills using these approaches. Although some teachers are helped, all may not have their needs met.

However, Joyce and Showers (2002) found that learning from workshops may increase if collaboration is included. In their research, teachers had the opportunity to practice new learning and get feedback from their peers. This model, which combined the use of a workshop with teacher collaboration, was more effective than the workshop alone. The coaching model was used to give follow-up support after the new learning form workshops.

Along the way, there must be specific embedded professional development for teachers, as well as common planning time to coach and support one another. While many teachers are likely to be highly competent content specialists and instructional leaders, their people skills may not be sufficient. This is where specific professional development in coaching strategies would be very helpful: “Coaching is a relationship between two equals, one of whom is committed to making personal and professional
improvements” (Barkley, 2005, p. 4). Teachers that are willing to collaborate and work on continuous improvement may be met with resistance by peers because the peers are not “the boss”. This is why understanding a coaching model is so important. It is not top-down management. The one being coached must have the desire to learn. If the coach has developed the appropriate listening and conversation skills during the embedded professional development program, the results could very well be positive for all. The resulting support and feedback from colleagues has a bonus effect—teachers at the same school develop a synergy of creativity. When administrators and teachers together undertake a coaching program, it gets even better: school-wide collegial support develops, students receive the benefit of an improved teacher in their classrooms, administrators receive the respect and support from an admiring and productive staff, and all receive the caring and support of each other. As a result, a quality learning experience occurs for students and throughout the professional learning community.

A professional learning community will provide quality learning experiences for teachers by allowing for job-embedded professional development. Job-embedded professional development is learning that occurs as educators engage in their daily work activities. It can be both formal and informal and includes but is not limited to discussion with others, peer coaching, mentoring, study groups and action research (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Since the most beneficial professional development includes embedded teacher collaboration (Wood & McQuarrie, 1999), Educators must seek to have it in place in all schools, including those at the secondary level. Effective professional development training for systemic change should be ongoing and job-embedded (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). Various processes to reflect and share best practices, such as coaching
and mentoring, action research, and professional networking opportunities, encourage teacher collaboration in job-embedded professional development opportunities (Wood & McQuarrie). Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) warn that collegiality is merely contrived by requiring teachers to plan together or engage in peer coaching without adequate training or support. Training and support occur naturally as teachers learn together during daily activities embedded in the work, thus alleviating the concern of contrived collegiality.

When professional development involves authentic activities, teachers are more likely to become actively involved in and committed to the process of professional development (Hirsh & Killion, 2007). Exploring the professional development that secondary principals have successfully incorporated and embedded in their schools, and what they need to further their work with teacher collaboration, is part of the work of this study.

**Principals’ Behaviors and Leadership**

Philosophically, collaborative leadership calls for a paradigm shift. Research often speaks of principal behavior in terms of strategies, but the work of Wheatley (2005) sheds great insight and deep perspective on how leaders can really move people. She speaks of leaders who live a “new story.” Leaders who live in the new story help others to understand themselves differently by the way they lead. They trust humanness; they welcome the surprises brought to them by others. They are curious about differences among people, they delight in others’ inventiveness, they nurture others, and they connect people. She says that they trust others who can create wisely and well, that they seek the best interests of organizations and community, and that these leaders want to bring more good into the world. According to Wheatley, principals’ work must have a sound
philosophical base which speaks to the deep work one must do with people to develop a larger purpose. She asserts that, when done correctly, this work actually becomes a *process* as opposed to a *structure*.

The principal must not only have a sound philosophical base, but he/she must also have a process in which to improve professional behavior and increase leadership capacity. Fullan (2001) gives us a framework for leadership, suggesting that building capacity in leaders is a must if leaders are to initiate change efforts, including moving from an isolated environment to a collaborative one. Fullan points to capacities and attributes as necessary characteristics for a strong leader. The capacities that he sees as indispensable are moral purpose, building relationships, understanding change, coherence making and knowledge creation/sharing. Surrounding and supporting those capacities are the character attributes of energy, enthusiasm, and hope. Fullan says that these attributes and capacities, which exist in varying degrees in all effective leaders, must be readily apparent to those who are following a specific leader. Fullan believes that as these attributes and capacities intermingle, effective leaders, those that can diminish negativity and increase professional synergy, emerge.

As rapid change and more complex problems are faced in the workplace, a leader must have effective and practical strategies to emulate. Fullan’s model fits perfectly with leaders who want to embrace leadership from the perspective of moral purpose. Other researchers support Fullan’s findings that in order to encourage collaboration among teachers in a school, principals should engage in and model those behaviors they wish to encourage. Although the description of a professional learning community includes increased teacher involvement in leadership, the school principal’s example is very
important in modeling the leadership behavior desired for all (Marzano, 2003). Gruenert (2005) agrees, suggesting that the issue of teacher collaboration must be addressed by principal leadership to develop a supportive climate and collaborative culture.

In other words, the need for an effective principal does not decrease with the empowerment of teachers. In order for innovations such as teacher collaboration to be successful, principals must supervise the many intricacies of the school simultaneously with the school improvement effort. The principal, as the instructional leader in a school, must support the processes necessary to enable teachers to work together both for their own learning and for overall school improvement (Fleming, 2004; Fullan, 1997).

Researchers have categorized various behavior attributes and leadership functions of a principal who successfully contributes to a professional learning community. Gruenert (2005) suggests that a principal’s human relations skills, levels of trust, decision-making, empowering or not empowering subordinates, and styles of dealing with conflict contribute to whether or not principals are successful as educational leaders. It is important that supervisory support from principals encourages teachers to be engaged in school reform and renewal efforts. Principals must stimulate intellectual curiosity and conversation by encouraging the exploration of research and theory in teacher collaboration through reading and discussion as well as serving as change agents by inspiring faculty and staff to be involved, take risks, stretch their professional competence, and perform at their best (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Supervisory support of principals can also encourage the entire staff to model behaviors that foster collegiality and a professional environment.
The principal’s leadership must also include knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment. Marzano et al. (2005) describe the leadership roles necessary for implementing a structure of teacher collaboration embedded in a professional learning community and they indicate that the principal must know curriculum, instruction, and assessment. If a principal is knowledgeable in these areas, the curriculum will become more standardized as teachers work in teams and determine what students should know and be able to do.

The principals’ knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment must combine with his/her professional behavior that models the importance of making increased student achievement a major purpose of the collaborative effort. The principal must articulate the belief that teacher collaboration is consistent with the belief that high expectations for all students and improved student achievement are the purposes of schooling. To do this, the principal must consistently communicate a personal belief that collaboration around shared goals will result in increased student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005).

Another important component of the principal’s leadership is the careful monitoring and evaluating of the impact of teacher collaboration as it plays out in the professional learning community. The monitoring must be continuous and include team examination of data and evaluation of results. Principals should have a specific plan for obtaining feedback and share that feedback on a regular basis (Gruenert, 2005). The principal must model flexibility by anticipating concerns and adjusting plans when necessary as he/she seeks feedback on the impact of teacher collaboration within the
professional learning community. This modeling of flexibility supports teacher collaboration and collaborative leadership (Marzano et al., 2005).

Principal’s must demonstrate leadership by finding a way to reallocate existing meeting times in order for teachers to work together collaboratively (Marzano et al., 2005). Schmoker (2006) indicates that the right kind of continuous, structured teacher collaboration which improves the quality of teaching and pays dividends in student learning and professional morale has yet to become the norm because time has not been allocated by many leaders. A principal may use certain strategies to set in motion the attempt to develop this job-embedded, continuous and applied professional learning community structure by making collaborative time a non-negotiable in the school day.

In addition to all of these challenges to the proper behavior and leadership of principals in promoting teacher collaboration, Whitaker (2002) discusses a subject that is always discouraging for administrators when attempting to develop a collaborative culture—the difficult teacher and how to deal with him/her. The difficult teacher is described as one who does not work well with students, who has a negative effect on other classroom teachers, who continually does things to offend or incite others, who sabotages any attempt at improvement, who dampens everyone’s enthusiasm, who damages school climate, and who parades students to the office regularly.

Principals must conduct themselves professionally and do everything possible to improve the difficult staff member so that he/she does not have a negative impact on the move to collaboration. Whitaker (2002) humorously notes that an administrator may have to squint in an attempt to find something good in some teachers. The explanation Whitaker gives for success in dealing with difficult teachers is to hold these teachers
accountable and support any attempt to improve, but to have the professional will to
document poor performance if they do not improve, all the while being extremely
cognizant of due process. Leadership is about change—how to justify it, implement it and
maintain it. Transformation will only happen when we become dissatisfied with
accepting the unsatisfactory performance of teachers who will not support systemic
excellence in our schools (Reeves, 2006). The worst mistake is to make their job easier by
ignoring them. Principals should never feel guilty about doing what is best for the young
people in their buildings. Principals should only feel guilty if they do not make the tough
choices on removing ineffective teachers that refuse to improve (Whitaker).

Principals must develop a climate where there is a high degree of trust and mutual
respect among teachers. It is logical that a lack of trust would make it unlikely that
teachers will engage in meaningful conversations and share their classroom or
instructional practices with their peers (Marzano et al., 2005). When an atmosphere of
trust and respect is developed, it becomes very hard for a teacher not to buy into a
apart from the status quo. The principal found in high performing schools will treat
everyone with respect and dignity and will always take a positive approach when
teaching teachers how to treat students. The principal will be respectful to students and
hire compassionate, highly skilled teachers to create a caring and effective learning
culture where all students are respected. The principal will deliberate thoughtfully and
make every decision based on what is best for students. Whitaker gives principals real
strategies of trust and respect to take control of their destiny as school leaders.
Being a principal is an amazing profession which requires professional behavior and leadership skills. It is challenging, dynamic, energizing, and draining—but most of all it is rewarding. The impact of a principal extends far beyond anything imaginable. Teachers and community have much to say about leaders, and principals can decide what it is they want those conversations to be like by the way they conduct themselves professionally each day. As the research gives insight as to how a collaborative culture is built in our secondary schools, it is imperative that research lend major support to identifying the efforts and behaviors needed in order for principals to succeed.

**Successful Efforts by Principals**

Fullan (1997) has suggested that the responsibility for operationalizing school change rests with the principal. School based improvements can be made at the local level even if change is not being made at the district, state or national level. Instead of placing blame for lack of school improvement on external agencies, principals should seek to overcome barriers to teacher collaboration at the school level, because some principals have been successful at doing so. This research asked principals about their perceptions of factors affecting teacher collaboration to further understand the possible benefits derived from the process. There are dimensions that support collaboration and implementing these efforts other principals have found effective will quite likely lead to successful collaborative practice in other secondary schools (Inger, 1993).

In a case study of one high school’s effort at developing teacher collaboration, the findings suggested that the policy and practice of developing collaborative time must become a priority. There must be common planning time regularly scheduled and embedded in the school day as well as other release time for collaboration (Inger, 1993).
Proper conditions, professional development and distributed leadership to do collaborative work, and ensuring that the process was an integral part daily school business were a part of the school culture. Successful teacher collaboration could be achieved if the key components of attitude, commitment, and professional beliefs of the school principal were manifested on a regular basis (Fitzgerald, 2005). The principal and other leaders must convey their faith and support in collaboration for the purpose of making the school better for students (Inger).

Hipp & Huffman (2004) documented the work of the principal at Foxdale Middle School. The teachers complained of barriers to teacher collaboration, including overload and lack of time to work together. The principal met with the teachers to address these barriers and eventually developed a plan to add five minutes to each school day in order to set aside time for collaboration. The principal helped build the capacity of the teachers by valuing the vision of collaboration and providing the resources and support necessary (Piccardi, 2005). There must be material support, including equipment, supplies, and technology to contribute to the teachers’ ability and willingness to work together successfully (Inger, 1993). The principal took on the responsibility at the school level and did not blame outside causes for these barriers. Working with teachers toward the same student-centered vision turned what appeared to be impossibility into a great success (Piccardi).

The actions of principals have great influence on the behaviors and attitudes of teachers (Cotton, 2003; DuFour & Eaker, 1998). In a study of high schools, the influence of effective principals on improving instruction was described in terms of their embracing growth and change, incorporating many forms of collaboration and professional dialogue,
encouraging risk-taking, respecting teachers’ knowledge, and working to enhance the professional community (Blase & Blase, 2001; Piccardi, 2005). There must be a cultural change to collaboration (Inger, 1993).

Specifically found to be effective among practicing principals were two actions: talking with teachers to promote reflection and promoting the professional growth of teachers (Blase & Blase, 2001). If principals are to support and encourage teacher collaboration within secondary schools, they would be more successful, according to these findings, if they were to carry out these two actions. There must be embedded professional development, including training and assistance on task-related work as well as time to reflect on the work (Inger, 1993).

Blase & Blase (2001) suggest that promoting reflection is one action that greatly encourages teacher collaboration. If a principal is to successfully promote reflection, he/she must make non-threatening suggestions to teachers, discuss teaching experiences, and model teaching techniques, as well as solicit advice and opinions on instruction from teachers. Teachers must have influence on matters of curriculum and instruction (Inger, 1993). The principal must also give caring and honest feedback to teachers, and praise teachers for specific teaching practices.

The practical suggestions Blase & Blase (2001) give principals to promote professional growth are modeling and supporting forms of collaboration such as peer coaching, peer observation, action research, inquiry and reflection. Principals must provide time for collaborative work and encourage teachers’ efforts to redesign programs. There must be an investment of teachers in team planning. The team approach must not be shallow, but about matters of compelling importance. School-level organization of
assignments and leadership must support collaboration by distributing leadership more broadly among teachers and administrators (Inger, 1993). The principals must remain personally involved in professional development by modeling practices and keeping the focus on teachers, teaching, and learning (Piccardi, 2005).

The successful efforts of principals contribute to the implementation of teacher collaboration. In studies of effective schools, there is documentation of specific actions taken by principals to support teacher collaboration. In some cases, barriers that seemed insurmountable had to be overcome in order to accomplish the collaborative efforts (Piccardi, 2005). A key question is raised as to why some principals can develop a school with teacher collaboration and others cannot. Research is needed to answer that question for secondary schools. This research identifies what prevents most secondary schools from practicing large-scale teacher collaboration. The factors that influence that practice have been thoroughly examined by this research. This study intends to identify the perceptions of secondary school principals regarding the factors affecting teacher collaboration in their schools.

**School Culture**

To facilitate a change in a secondary school where teaching in isolation is the norm, a change in school culture would need to be implemented (Piccardi, 2005). According to Tableman (2004a), “School culture is a reflection of the shared ideas, assumptions, values and beliefs that give a secondary school its identity and standard for expected behaviors” (p.1). Members of a professional learning community require a belief that teacher collaboration is valuable. Merely going through the motions of collaborating would not be authentic learning or improvement (Fullan, 2001; Little,
Richardson (1996) suggests that the three most important norms of a healthy school culture are collegiality, experimentation, and reaching out to a knowledge base. This finding underscores the value of collaboration. Contrived teacher collaboration is not a genuine cultural change. Teachers should want to interact because they see the value in it (Piccardi).

Fullan & Hargreaves (1996) found that a collaborative school culture was critical to both achieving and maintaining school improvement. The school culture influences how people within a school behave (Piccardi, 2005). To be successful, a new initiative such as teacher collaboration would need the culture of the school behind it. Deal and Peterson (1999) found that cultural patterns are extremely influential on teachers’ performance, thinking, acting, and feeling. Without teachers and other school community members jointly valuing the initiative of teacher collaboration, there will be no support for carrying it out. There will be resistance and some could even openly oppose participating if the culture of the school does not value teacher collaboration. School leadership wishing to implement any program such as teacher collaboration must work to align the school’s cultural beliefs (Piccardi).

Leadership is critical in creating a culture that prevents contrived collaboration and builds a culture of successful teacher collaboration. Lambert (1998) sets an expectation that principals improve the capacity of teachers to lead their own educational growth and collaborate with each other by changing the codependent relationship between principal and teachers. Lambert indicated that principals should ask teachers for their thoughts on issues, help analyze issues and make decisions and renegotiate responsibilities of teachers and principals. It is suggested that a new way of thinking of
the work of teachers and principals will develop when principals take steps to change school culture.

Lambert (1998) noted guidelines of developing a collaborative culture where all teachers are learners. Such teachers clarify and define community values, beliefs, assumptions, perceptions and experiences. They inquire into practice together. They construct meaning and knowledge together. They frame action and develop implementation plans together. They provide long term support for one another and challenge one another to improve continuously. Leadership in creating the successful school culture evolves as the learners themselves evolve toward a larger sense of purpose.

School leadership can work to create a collaborative culture that is a safe place to risk failure while teachers try new practices (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). A collaborative culture would provide a professional atmosphere where teachers would be allowed to construct their own knowledge while collaborating with other teachers. Teachers would know it would be safe to admit their weaknesses and would be more willing to try promising new practices that could possible fail (Piccardi, 2005).

When collaborative teachers want to improve their practice, they seek the input of resources, including human resources, which will help the changes to be genuine (Piccardi, 2005). School leadership must support this expectation with leadership actions, including being sensitive to the allocation of their time as well as material resources. One of the secrets to profound cultural change is the willingness of leaders to do unglamorous work (Reeves, 2009). Leaders should provide relentless attention to modeling responsiveness to mundane tasks to accomplish their need for facilitating the larger goal of continuous learning of the teachers.
If schools are to achieve a culture of continuous learning for students, they must have a culture conducive to learning for teachers. Teachers must willingly assume responsibility for improving their knowledge and skills in order to strengthen their teaching. A collaborative school culture has been shown to be important to the encouragement and support of student and teacher learning (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Hord, 1999). Success in student achievement includes leadership by example, including leadership by teachers who place the interests of students first by committing to their own effort of continuous learning (Reeves, 2009). Results seen in schools that have transitioned to collaborative cultures have included higher morale, enhanced commitment to education, and higher retention rates (Edmonson, Fisher, Brown, & Lunenburg, 2002). It is reasonable to suggest that a successful school would have a culture that values continuous learning for teachers and students.

Exemplary collaborative school cultures have teachers who engage in focused professional development activities which support a culture of collaboration. This type of school culture should implement broader learning objectives than just their own subject matter and use differentiation strategies to reach students at all levels. In this example of school culture where teachers work together across the curriculum and use differentiation strategies, teachers interpret student achievement data to make decisions about teaching and recognize student and teacher achievement within a context of support (Dolejs, 2006).

Studies of effective schools have established a number of cultural elements that seem to have some impact on student achievement. Fullan (1993) along with Deal and Peterson (1999) point to the importance of a shared vision championed by a strong leader.
with a sense of. The studies examined how successful teachers valued and used the shared vision and strong leadership to become more certain of which teaching strategies would help them be successful in the classroom. In contrast, within a culture of isolation, a teacher attempting to use teacher collaboration would be met with uncooperative teachers who did not share the value of collaborative time together. However, a healthy school culture will have strong leadership and a shared vision along with a tradition of rewarding collaboration and continuous learning.

The industrial model of education, where teachers work at their stations and students move lockstep through the system, does not work well in today’s secondary schools. The changes that are necessary for reform and improvement must be supported by the school’s culture in order to be successful (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Fullan, 2001). To be successful then, there must be a culture of collaboration (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

A collaborative culture includes providing opportunities for teachers to work together (Gruenert & Lucas, 2000). Collaboration cannot be mandated; however, it must be authentic to be meaningful, not contrived. The opportunities provided by school leadership should place teachers within conditions that call for shared responsibility (Little, 1999). There are behaviors principals can engage in and structures that can be built into the school culture that lend support to teacher collaboration, such as joint-work, team teaching, peer observation, common planning time, and shared decision making (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). These structures create a context for meaningful dialogue between teachers and can be more effective if the principal does some of the “unglamorous work” to support teachers in these opportunities (Reeves, 2009). After assessing a secondary school’s existing culture as it relates to teacher collaboration,
school leadership can reference the research to identify strategies that will help to transition to a more collaborative culture. This study gave principals the opportunity to highlight the success they have found in creating a collaborative culture in secondary schools, and the barriers they have encountered in their efforts.

**Barriers to Overcome**

For many years, researchers and theorists have argued that teaching is a profession that can no longer be practiced in isolation (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). They argue that the tradition of teacher isolation is still so entrenched in schools that it is a barrier to fostering a meaningful collaborative culture. The outdated tradition of isolation is unfortunately regarded as the normal way to teach in many schools (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). Hargreaves (1994) asserts that isolation and individualism are harmful to the teaching profession and need to be eliminated.

A teacher with an isolationist attitude and individualistic approach to teaching is a barrier that can have an adverse effect on teacher collaboration. Teachers in secondary schools see each other at odd times and it is often between periods, at lunch, or after school during chance meetings. As a matter of fact, some teachers spend their lunch time in their classrooms isolated from others. “Collaboration” among secondary teachers in this sort of environment takes place during their preparation period, and that often ends up being a gossip or gripe session. Secondary teachers develop a very autonomous attitude grounded in their privacy, and often they simply want to be left alone. Teachers often think that what others are doing is none of their business and will only support another teacher or answer questions when asked. There is a very high value placed on autonomy, and veteran teachers have very strong and sometimes aggressive views, in
support of the whole concept of autonomy (Inger, 1993). These isolationist attitudes can have an adverse effect on teacher collaboration.

The barrier of isolationist and individualistic teachers is discouraged by research that urges educators to accept the challenge to break the norm of isolation and begin to create school as a place where collaboration can grow and flourish. The same teachers who willingly trade stories and talk about family often do not dare share their professional successes and struggles from the classroom. The outdated tradition of isolation and refusal to discuss professional successes or struggles due to embarrassment or pride has unfortunately come to be regarded as the normal way to teach in many schools (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). It is not easy to break this norm of professional isolation (Fitzgerald, 2005).

Becoming a teacher that places the highest priority on the content as opposed to what is best for the student can be a barrier to teacher collaboration. Since secondary teachers consider themselves content experts, most of them are organized according to their content areas, and to many their whole frame of reference is their content. In other words, one becomes a history teacher and commonly refers to himself/herself as a history teacher and not a teacher of students. The peer group of a teacher many times becomes other people in the same content area. It would appear that state policies and teacher preparation programs set secondary teachers up for this experience both by the way secondary teachers are licensed as well as by the way standards are set up at the state level. A secondary teacher’s professional identity is actually heavily influenced by, if not set by, the subject area which he/she teaches and a wall or barrier becomes established between departments according to the subject he/she teaches. When teachers focus solely
on content knowledge to the exclusion of their colleagues’ expertise and what might be best for student learning, they are denying both themselves and their students the possibilities of learning in new ways. The norm of individualism is then strengthened because teachers do not see the need to expand their knowledge base beyond their own discipline (Fitzgerald, 2005). As teachers enter the profession with this paradigm, it becomes very difficult to convert to a collaborative style. This individualism of practice allows the teacher to select his/her own indicators of effectiveness and gives the teacher the chance to align personal goals with the capacities and interests already self selected if not monitored closely by supervisors and curriculum personnel. As the teacher works out his/her own individual satisfactory assessment of professional practice, he/she is likely to resist conditions that would force change. The teacher now has a stake in personal autonomy to practice individually if he/she is allowed to practice their discipline in isolation with no regard to collegial interaction (Lortie, 1975)

Another barrier to teacher collaboration is the physical separation of content departments. The social and organizational isolation are increased exponentially by the fragmented departments and program separation. As currently arranged, the worlds of secondary education are not interdependent and there is little reason for colleagues to have regular contact with each other in the daily work. The various content departments find no compelling reason to try and collaborate with one another. Even if some wanted to collaborate, they are given few opportunities to do so (Inger, 1993). The architecture and organizational structure of schools that contribute to the isolation of teachers has been in place since the early 1900’s. In the typical American secondary school, once the teacher closes the classroom door, he or she has limited contact with colleagues. Teachers
have always been separated from one another in practice, an organizational process which hinders professional interdependence and collegiality (Lortie, 1975). We have designed schools both physically and organizationally to restrict teacher’s access to other professionals (Eisner, 1992). Under such conditions, it is a plus to just be congenial, but to reach collegial or collaborative work is far more difficult.

Another barrier may be the perceived difference in status among academic disciplines, vocational disciplines, and special education. For example, special education teachers often perceive that regular education commands greater institutional respect than special education. In many high schools, these areas of instruction can be separate worlds and a “we versus them” mentality may quickly evolve. Even though it does not always happen, these status differences can be manifested by separation socially, organizationally, and educationally (Inger, 1993).

The higher value that some in a school culture place on college bound students as opposed to “regular” or special education students can become a barrier to teacher collaboration by marginalizing the non-college-bound students, their teachers, and their curricula. Although such judgments may not be intentional, nonetheless this does set a mental picture of an attitude held by many secondary teachers. When a content area teacher feels that his/her work does not earn the same high-value status as that of another teacher, he/she may feel devalued, thus establishing a barrier to collaboration. Teachers who developed skills in a specific area or content such as special education mathematics because it held genuine appeal for them, and who entered teaching in the hope of finding students with whom they could have a positive impact may find themselves viewed not as skilled educators, but only as keepers of marginal students (Little, 1990).
Lack of job-embedded time for teachers to meet and work together is seen as one of the major barriers to successful teacher collaboration. Darling-Hammond (1999) associates the structure of how time is organized in schools as an inheritance from the factory model of school design. Teachers were thought to be productive only when teaching their students. Time for teacher collaboration was not seen as necessary, so teachers were expected to take care of kids without every seriously collaborating, grade to grade and class period to class period. The underlying assumption was that there was no need for teachers to plan, organize their work, consult with colleagues, or develop their skills.

Since the practice of collaboration is not institutionalized in most schools, time as related to the transition from isolation to collaboration is a significant barrier. At the outset of a reform effort, teachers need time to learn about and practice the new behaviors that will be expected of them, whether the reforms are imposed from above or developed at the school level. Incorporating time up front in the transition to a collaborative culture is a critically important step in the effort. The availability of up-front time is especially important when teachers are working collaboratively on curriculum design and development, because this work involves a great amount of time in addition to regular classroom duties, and can result in stress and frustration (Adelman & Walking-Eagle, 1997).

The inability to be more flexible with time has long been recognized as a barrier to school reform. Schmoker (2002) cites time as a school’s most precious and scarce commodity. Time—or more properly, the lack of it—is one of the most difficult problems faced by schools. Time for teachers to get together to discuss student needs,
curriculum, or any important issue surrounding secondary education is very limited. Finding time to meet, talk, and interact in a meaningful way is a basic need if collaboration is to exist, but traditionally that time is not built into the school day. When there is no flexibility with time and scheduling, it is safe to assume collaboration will not occur on a regular basis (Peterson, 1994).

Time related tensions can result as teachers try to balance their expanding job description within a structure that is no longer suited for more individualized professional learning. Adelman and Walking-Eagle (1997) suggest that time allocated for teachers to learn and become comfortable with new pedagogies is often inadequate or nonexistent, resulting in teachers being torn at not being able to give their full attention to everything all of the time.

The question then becomes: how are teachers to be given job-embedded time to manage themselves when their day is already scheduled to the maximum? At the secondary level, the answer may involve a reduction in the teaching load, elimination of administrative duties, changing the daily schedule, or a combination of all three. These solutions involve a change in working conditions, and each school or district would need to somehow indentify the resources to support such a change. Financial conditions are a major constraint, but districts making a commitment to the important practice of collaboration have worked to overcome the hurdle. Scheduling common planning time for teachers is one solution that would fit the current school schedule while not incurring a financial cost (Fitzgerald, 2005).

In a 2000 study, it was noted that personal values can also be a barrier to teacher collaboration. When teachers come together with different perspectives and pedagogical
strategies, there can be tension. Attempting to help teachers confront and overcome differences can be a challenge for a school principal. Often, teachers want to avoid conflict, and they would naturally avoid collaboration if it were to cause conflict (Putman & Borko, 2000).

Lack of trust can be a barrier to successful teacher collaboration. Trust is a personal value that teachers and principals must share if collaboration is to be successful. In new learning, such as working collaboratively, teachers will need both support and guidance as they attempt to think out of the box. Lack of trust between the principal and teacher would be a great barrier to teacher collaboration (Fleming & Thomson, 2004). Trust is the one thing, which, if removed, will destroy the most powerful government and the most successful school. On the other hand, if developed and leveraged, trust is the thing that has the potential to create unparalleled success in every dimension of life. Yet, far too often, the value of trust is overlooked and neglected (Covey, 2006).

Trust is a pragmatic, tangible, actionable asset than is the key leadership competency of our day. Trust is something one can do something about. Trust in an educational setting means that principals will treat teachers with respect, and confidence will be expressed in their integrity and their abilities. According to Covey (2006), if teachers and other school leaders will base their relationships on trust as described within this context, the politics of work, the burnout, the bureaucracy, the ethical violations, and any other barrier imaginable can be dealt with effectively. Adding trust to other skills can greatly enhance the breaking down of barriers to teacher collaboration.

Some barriers to successful collaboration that have been mentioned are teacher isolation, a difference in status of teachers, (figurative) departmental walls, physical
separation, lack of job-embedded time to collaborate, and personal values such as the need to avoid conflict and the lack of trust. Clearly, teaching has become so complex that it can no longer be done effectively with teachers working in isolation and teacher collaboration must be absolutely central in making secondary schools succeed.

It is time for the educational system to move away from those norms and structures that are keeping teachers stuck in an outdated, isolated way of practicing the craft of teaching. Those who are responsible for the future of our schools must give serious thought and effort to supporting the move from isolation to collaboration. If teachers are to work often and successfully as colleagues, school policy must support them. Schedules, staff assignments, and access to resources must be made conducive to shared work where teachers learn together, work together toward a common purpose, and take shared responsibility in the continuous learning of their students (DuFour, 2003; Inger, 1993). As school policy-makers examine new ways of teaching that are more conducive to this shared work, it is important that they do not take a view of the shared day as an addition to the day. The message must be sent that shared work is of such importance that it is embedded into the everyday practice of teaching. DuFour and Eaker (1998) suggest that meaningful collaboration must be systemically embedded into the daily life of the school if professional learning communities are to be built. School systems can no longer be institutions whose members work in isolation from one another. In order for collaboration to be successful, the culture of isolation in schools must be eliminated (Fitzgerald, 2005).
Conclusion

There is significant evidence that teacher collaboration can improve instruction and therefore have a positive impact on student learning. If secondary educators aim to maximize their capacity to be effective, research indicates that teacher collaboration must be a strong component of their work; however, it is not practiced on a large scale (Barth, 2001; Fullan, 2001). Research points to the principal as the one wielding the greatest influence as to whether teacher collaboration becomes meaningful or whether it is contrived. If the principal does not give support, teacher collaboration will not occur in a sustained fashion (Fullan, 1997).

The existing research describes the ways successful schools collaborate, and suggests that the benefits of collaboration impact both teachers and students. However, the factors influencing how that collaboration came about are not described in detail for secondary schools. There is not any elaboration regarding how principals approached and overcame the barriers to collaboration as they worked to implement a new school culture. Secondary principals need to know what is entailed to implement and foster the conditions necessary for effective teacher collaboration.

The research repeatedly described successful strategies and practices in the area of secondary teacher collaboration and identified the benefits derived from a culture of collaboration, but more needs to be learned about how to implement these practices and strategies. This study seeks to expand the knowledge base at the secondary level in this important area. The goal is to attempt to deepen the understanding of factors that influence the development of secondary teacher collaboration, and thereby share these factors with other secondary educators.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Researchers over the last decade and beyond offer that sustained, substantive school improvement will be best realized when schools learn to function as professional learning communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Fitzgerald, 2005; Hord, 1997). A professional learning community can be described as a community of learners where adults and students alike are engaged as active learners in matters of special importance and where everyone encourages learning (Barth, 2001). To become a professional learning community, it is essential for teachers to acquire the ability to work together, and to collaborate (Fitzgerald).

Job-embedded opportunities for teacher collaboration have been reported as a successful method for promoting teacher professional learning, which in turn will promote increased student learning (Little, 1990). Researchers and theorists cite properly supported teacher collaborations as key to lasting school improvement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Fitzgerald, 2005; Fullan, 1993).

In order for the practice of collaboration to be implemented in schools, an environment must be created to support collaborative efforts (Fitzgerald, 2005). DuFour and Eaker (1998) cite creating a culture where teacher collaboration can thrive as the most important factor for successful school improvement initiatives and the leading indicator for those seeking to enhance the effectiveness of their school. The research
clearly denotes a connection between school improvement and teacher collaboration (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Schmoker, 2002).

The need for teacher collaboration is stated in the report *What Matters Most: Teaching for America’s Future*, written by the National Commission of Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF, 1996). The Commission connects teacher collaboration to the development of a highly qualified teaching force (Fitzgerald, 2005). A key recommendation of the report calls for providing teachers with regularly scheduled time for collegial work and planning. They found that in order to meet the changing demands of their jobs, effective teachers of high quality must be capable and willing to continuously learn and relearn their trade. They noted building capacity among teachers is important since the demands of teaching are constantly changing and expanding. Collaboration with other teachers is one strategy that would help to build educators’ capacity for learning, one benefit of which is more effective teaching (NCTAF).

Principals are in an excellent position to support this collaboration process, which in turn improves teaching and increases student achievement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 1997).

The purpose of this qualitative multi-case study was to describe the teacher collaboration process within secondary schools for practicing secondary principals in the Northwest Region of Arkansas. This chapter describes the methodology used to answer the central research question and subquestions below.

**Central Question**

How do various practicing secondary principals in the Northwest Region of Arkansas perceive the teacher collaboration process within secondary schools?
Subquestions

- How did the process unfold?
- What were the major events in the process?
- What were the barriers to change in the process?
- Who were the important participants? How did they participate in the process?
- How were the program participants (teachers) changed by the process? How were the non-program participants (teachers, staff, administrators, etc.) changed by the process?
- What strategies did secondary principals use to support the process?
- What training and professional development did secondary principals use to improve the process?
- What were the outcomes from the process for school personnel and students?

This chapter presents the methods and procedures used in this study and is divided into six sections: research design, sample, instrumentation, data collection procedures, analytical methods, and limitations.

Research Design

Qualitative research was used for this study of principals’ experiences in order to explore and document data on the perceptions of principal informants. Qualitative research includes a process of inquiry that enables the researcher to understand a social or human problem more accurately (Creswell, 1994). In this study, secondary school principals described their experiences by indicating factors affecting teacher collaboration in their schools with attention given to their day to day experiences (Shank, 2002).
A multi case-design was used to create a broader understanding among secondary educators of what factors affect teacher collaboration in secondary schools. With this type of design, Creswell (1994) describes how to create a picture with words using details taken from informants can be effective in helping create an understanding of research. This type of research is important when researchers study two or more subjects or settings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). We enlisted a multi-case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the specific situations and the common themes that they share. In addition, this design allowed the focus to be placed on process rather than outcome, the context rather than any specific variable, and the discovery of themes rather than the confirmation of a hypothesis (Merriam, 1998).

The qualitative multi-case study approach was practical because we were able to interact with informants and produce an enhanced flow of information (Creswell, 1994). Inductive investigation led to certain themes emerging as patterns of information. The inductive process was useful in exploring the nature of a topic that was not fully known (Piccardi, 2005). These patterns persisted across the data representing various themes (Shank, 2002). These themes helped better understand the complexity of the topic under investigation where quantitative studies have proved insufficient.

**Focus Group Interviews**

Researchers have increased the use of focus groups in recent years to gather in-depth, easy to understand information in a relatively short period of time (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The focus group approach allows participants to clarify their responses (Gay & Airasian, 2000), and Krueger and Casey (2009) furthermore suggest that focus groups provide insights about people’s perspectives. This result may be
because focus groups allow participants to state their perceptions more freely than one-on-one interviews, as the interaction of participants is sometimes useful in stimulating dialogue (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003).

The researcher used focus group interviews to examine, in depth, the beliefs, attitudes, and inner experiences of respondents (Gall et al., 2003), simulating conditions in which information shared by respondents exceeded expectations in both quantity and quality (Piccardi, 2005). A series of discussions were held with small groups to determine the perceptions, feelings, and thinking of respondents on specific issues. The facilitator of the group asked questions and had the responsibility to keep the discussion focused, because group interviews can lose focus if not moderated properly. Group members responded to each other’s ideas as well as to the questions of the moderator and there was an emphasis on both the statements of individual members as well the interactions in response (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Several focus groups were held to provide the opportunity for the identification of trends or patterns of information.

Planning the focus group was crucial to accomplish the purpose of the study in a timely manner and required that abstract thoughts be assigned in concrete terms to be efficient (Krueger & Casey, 2009). A written interview guide was developed (Appendix A), as well as a checklist that helped to define teacher collaboration operationally (Appendix B). The researcher also asked participants to explain responses during the focus group interview to stay on target with the planned purpose of the session.
Sample

To select the participants, the researcher used intensity sampling, also called maximal variation, which allowed a broad sampling of individuals from different types of school districts. Focus group interviews were held with 17 participants from seven of the 20 school districts throughout the Northwest Region of Arkansas. Of the seven districts represented at the focus groups, two were rural, two were suburban, and three were urban. There were six female participants and 11 male participants. The purposive sample of practicing principals from Northwest Arkansas provided rich sources of data that were useful in understanding the concepts of teacher collaboration from the participants’ points of view.

In a single-category focus group, as was employed in this study, participants are chosen who are considered information-rich people to the extent that they have a significant degree of knowledge on the topic of the focus group (Krueger & Casey, 2009). In this multi-case study, those chosen were practicing principals in schools where teacher collaboration had been attempted, and teacher collaboration was the single category of study in these focus groups. Secondary principals were chosen as desirable informants because they have specific knowledge and perceptions about teacher collaboration that would not otherwise be available to the researcher, and were more likely to discuss both the explicit and implicit issues involved (Shank, 2002). As school leaders, secondary principals possess a perspective that goes beyond the single classroom teacher’s view in their knowledge of collaborative behavior throughout the entire school (Piccardi, 2005). For these reasons, secondary school principals were the key informants.
The researchers telephoned potential participants to invite them to take part in a focus group interview session to be held at a later date. If the response to this initial inquiry was positive, a follow-up invitation was mailed to the responding principal to confirm the time, date, and location of the scheduled focus group (see Appendix D). The following incentives were offered to principals to improve attendance: (a) refreshments at the meeting, (b) a copy of the forthcoming research summary, (c) eligibility for two tickets to a movie theatre, and (d) eligibility for a $30.00 gift certificate to Wal-Mart.

Two weeks before the date of the focus group, the researcher sent a reminder email to the participants about the upcoming meeting. One week before the date of the focus group, a reminder phone call was made to the participants about the meeting. Before joining in focus group discussions, participants signed voluntary informed consent forms (see Appendix E).

**Instrumentation**

Before data collection began, the researcher designed a moderator’s guide (see Appendix A). The guide provided direction in the inclusion and sequencing of the questions to be asked, all of which were aligned to the research questions. The more general questions were placed early in the interview protocol and the more specific questions were placed later, as is generally recommended to improve flow and consistency, as well as to aid analysis (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The moderator’s guide was a tool to assist focusing the discussions, but the sequence of questions retained flexibility in order to support a fluid discussion of the issues (Piccardi, 2005). To determine validity, the researcher listened to the participants, observed how they answered the questions, and sought clarification on areas of ambiguity. Then, at the
conclusion of each focus group, the researcher asked participants to verify or summarize their comments (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Accepted protocol included giving advance notice of the focus group sessions, developing and practicing questions to be asked, planning and scheduling of all logistics, practicing moderator skills, and debriefing immediately after each focus group session (Krueger & Casey). The researcher followed this accepted protocol by using the checklist for focus group interviews included in the guide for focus group research developed by Krueger & Casey to ensure that results were trustworthy and accurate.

Another method used to help participants focus on the discussion of concepts was the dispensing of two checklists. One listed teacher behaviors that demonstrated dimensions of teacher collaboration and the other noted possible facilitators or barriers to teacher collaboration. Piccardi (2005) developed these checklists from research on elementary teacher collaboration and were used to promote consistency in the understanding of the concepts of teacher collaboration and facilitators/barriers to teacher collaboration. Permission was granted to the researcher to use and/or modify the original checklists.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Data were obtained from three focus group interviews. The researcher played the role of moderator of the groups, the primary instrument for collecting data, and the avenue that kept individuals in the group focused on the topic being discussed. Throughout these interviews, the researcher obtained in-depth information about the participants’ thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations, and feelings about a topic (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). All participants were encouraged to share their
experiences, listen to others, and to respond to each other to maximize data collection (Piccardi, 2005). The researcher used this format to have control in obtaining detailed answers to questions (Creswell, 1994).

As the questions were asked and answered, the researcher made judgments about what information was significant and made field notes during each focus group, as well as follow-up notes afterward (Patton, 1990). The focus group discussions were both audio and video tape-recorded. The audio recordings were transcribed to assist in data analysis.

Data collection for the focus group discussions took place at times and in places that were convenient for the participants. The researcher located a meeting place that was easy to find and comfortable for the participants (Krueger & Casey, 2009). A familiar setting of a conference room where principal’s meetings, as well as other meetings with staff or parents were regularly conducted was used as a location for the focus groups.

Krueger and Casey (2009) suggested that the ideal size of a focus group for most noncommercial topics is five to eight participants. For this study, the focus group participation rate was six, six, and five for the three meetings of this study. The researcher encouraged a less formal, conversational style of discussion (Piccardi, 2005).

Because the focus group discussions were audio and video-tape recorded, it was necessary to have the recording equipment located in the room. The recording equipment was explicitly pointed out as necessary to garner the important thoughts the participants had to offer, and we reminded the focus groups that all recordings were confidential (Krueger & Casey).

The researcher asked each of the questions from the moderator’s guide and as participants shared their thoughts, we allowed the discussion to flow naturally, using
pauses and probes as appropriate, and occasionally interrupted participants to keep the
group focused and to move the conversation along from question to question until closure
was brought to the discussion (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

To maintain accuracy of the data collection, the researcher presented a summary
of the discussion at the end of each focus group (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Using this
method allowed for participants to verify or clarify the data collected and thus enhanced
the content validity of the discussion.

Analytical Methods

Following each of the three focus groups, as well as during the group sessions,
field notes were taken by an assistant moderator. Those field notes, transcripts of the
discussions, audio tape recordings, and video tape recordings were reviewed for analysis.
By analyzing the notes, transcripts, and recordings, the researcher analyzed the data into
concrete, identifiable themes (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

The central research question and subquestions directed the analysis for this
study. The researcher systematically arranged and reviewed the collected data for
recurring patterns of information to articulate the analysis clearly (Creswell, 1994;
Krueger & Casey, 2009). Through the process of sorting information and coding
categories, a description of secondary school principals’ perceptions of factors affecting
teacher collaboration emerged. The descriptive information was entered into a narrative
format with the use of a data display to connect the focus group questions to the research
questions, which, according to Miles and Huberman (1994) made use of a “visual format
that presents information systematically, so the user can draw valid conclusions and take
needed action” (as cited in Piccardi, 2005, p. 91).
The written report was developed and organized by conceptual coherence of the data gathered for the central research question and subquestions to appropriately report the data, using principles that stated the analysis clearly and effectively (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Krueger & Casey, 2009). The researcher represented the data and communicated what the data revealed given the purpose of the study (Patton, 1990). Through the multi-case design, the researcher used the resulting descriptive narrative to synthesize the knowledge and develop an expanded knowledgebase concerning teacher collaboration (Krueger & Casey; Miles & Huberman).

However, the nature of qualitative research did not allow the results to be broadly generalized (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Shank, 2002). The assumption was that each individual and each setting was unique, and generalization at best was tentative. The researcher did not attempt to identify trends that would produce reliably predictable and controllable phenomena.

**Limitations**

The researcher recognizes that there are limitations to this qualitative multi-case study. The fact that the researcher was also an assistant superintendent at a school in which five of the focus group principal participants either worked or had worked was a threat to the internal validity of the study. Even though the participants were assured that no harm would come to them answering interview questions, they may have been reserved in their responses for fear of disappointing the researcher or fear of their own positions.

The incorporation of unintended assumptions by the researcher is another limitation of the study. While the researcher was careful not to make assumptions, his
close relationship to the participants of the focus groups, and his long tenure as an administrator in Northwest Arkansas may have caused him to make certain unintentional assumptions based on his knowledge of the school systems and how they functioned.

The short duration of the research is a limitation in this study. A study of longer length would have provided more information in greater detail. The small sample of this study can also be considered to be a limitation of the study, as all participants were volunteers who were known to the researcher prior to the start of this study. Furthermore, the bias of the researcher toward the positive aspects of collaborative work is also noted as a limitation of the study.

Another limitation is that the reported outcomes on instruction and student achievement are perceptions. This anecdotal qualitative evidence must be triangulated with quantitative data to be meaningful.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that this study is not generalized to other groups. Rather it sought to inform the practice of principals in a regionalized area as they worked to improve education for students in their respective school districts in Northwest Arkansas.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This qualitative investigation focused on perceptions of principals in Northwest Arkansas of the collaboration process within secondary schools. Focus group interviews with these secondary school principals provided rich qualitative data to describe the collaboration processes in their respective schools. This research addressed one central question and eight subquestions:

Central Question

How do various practicing secondary principals in the Northwest Region of Arkansas perceive the teacher collaboration process within secondary schools?

Subquestions

- How did the process unfold?
- What were the major events in the process?
- What were the barriers to change in the process?
- Who were the important participants? How did they participate in the process?
- How were the program participants (teachers) changed by the process? How were the non-program participants (teachers, staff, administrators, etc) changed by the process?
- What strategies did secondary principals use to support the process?
- What training and professional development did secondary principals use to improve the process?
- What were the outcomes from the process for school personnel and students?
Data Collection

The data for this research were gathered from Northwest Arkansas secondary school principals who attended one of three focus groups. A standard protocol was used for each group (see Appendix A) which elicited rich qualitative data from the participants.

The questions asked in each focus group were designed to elicit thoughtful responses from secondary principals about the practice of teacher collaboration in their schools. The 14 open-ended questions addressed the central research question and eight subquestions of this investigation. Principals were able to answer the questions, decline to answer the questions, elaborate on others’ responses, have differences of opinions, and share any opinion they had. It was explained that there were no right or wrong answers.

Characteristics of Sample

All participants in the focus groups were principals of secondary schools in Northwest Arkansas. Their years of experience ranged from one year to more than 15 years. Three focus group interviews were held with 17 participants. The participants were from seven school districts in Northwest Arkansas representing rural, suburban, and urban areas. Six female principals and 11 male principals participated. All principals had an interest in facilitating efforts of teachers to work more collaboratively and all embraced growth and change in their school to improve instruction and student achievement.
Results

Research Subquestion 1: How Did the Process Unfold?

Responses to focus group questions 1 and 4 indicated that principals held multiple perceptions of the dynamics of the collaborative process in their schools. There was basic agreement on what initial behaviors were involved in the beginning of teacher collaboration. There were also principal behaviors identified by study participants found to be factors affecting successfully beginning a process of teacher collaboration.

During the interviews, principals indicated that several patterns emerged which led to more successful efforts of teacher collaboration. Patterns that secondary principals in this study perceived as affecting the unfolding of teacher collaboration included:

- Conversation in which teachers and principals collaborate naturally and informally, such as when teachers feel trust and when divisions and factions among teachers were not pronounced.
- The appropriate traits and behaviors demonstrated by the principal, such as modeling learning and collaborating, helping teachers overcome the obstacles to collaborating, and facilitating collaboration among teachers.
- Networking with a professional model that supported teacher collaboration, such as Bill Daggett Model Schools Conference, Middle School Movement, High Schools That Work, Arkansas Leadership Academy Team Institute, and Partnership with University of Arkansas Fort Smith and Educational Renewal.

Question one describes specific factors affecting the unfolding of teacher collaboration which principals discussed and displays comments from the principals, which are representative and supportive of their discussion of the factors.
Factor 1: Teachers and principals collaborate informally. Principals reported that teacher collaboration has been occurring informally in their buildings all along. For example, one principal stated, “I think teachers will meet each other in the hall and those kinds of places and those are very important to notice, as a principal, because you’re seeing the informal collaboration that’s already set up and where we start from.” Principals commented that since teachers have always collaborated informally, they would build on the fact that they already collaborate and then celebrate that. As one principal suggested, “The relationship building and professional development which began at the building level and district level in an informal way helped the district leadership meetings which began to occur more formally become successful and that was something to celebrate.” Another principal observed that “the process of collaboration and team meetings was new to most in the early stages” but that they “worked together to build our model to meet our goals and district initiatives. The informal collaboration set us up for success with formal collaboration.”

Principals suggested trust was a motivating factor for emerging teacher collaboration. For example, one principal observed that allowing teachers to become leaders in professional development began to build trust. “It allowed teachers to showcase what they’re doing, you know, to take all the work that you’re doing in the team meetings and professional development and give them ownership in what they’re doing.” It follows then, that making a safe environment to share what they are doing with others was very important, according to principals.

Principals also related that trust was built as teachers observed the excitement of the building principal and his/her leadership team:
• “It builds trust for a teacher, because you know, people can see the fire that may help with the buy-in of what you’re trying to do as a principal.”

• “I think we’ve had a lot of success and really good collaboration by first trusting each other in the educational team—that being me and my assistant principals, my directors, and all my teachers—and listening to everybody’s opinion and trying to make the best decisions possible.”

Divisions within the faculty are reduced as the process of teacher collaboration unfolds. Principals’ comments about the unfolding of teacher collaboration relate that people support what they create, and by honoring their concerns, hearing their opinions, and letting them get comfortable with things. “We started off that first year with fewer divisions in our faculty,” as one principal stated. Teachers sometimes get defensive and “they’ll think...this is forced teamwork... I’ve got to be on this clown’s team?”

Principals begin to ease these concerns with getting to know the talents, interests, and hobbies of their staff “so we can just start by respecting each other,” as another principal asserted.

Clearly, the comments from principals suggested that although some may have different opinions, professionalism and courtesy allowed collaboration to emerge. As one principal observed, “We may be at odds with what we’re talking about, but at least we respect each other and that builds trust.”

**Factor 2: The principal models the appropriate traits and behaviors.** The principals all felt that they could obtain buy-in from teachers if the principal was completely committed to the collaborative effort. As one principal said:
I need to be right there in the ditch with them and working with that collaborative piece, whether it be talking to the math department about this, or the science department about that—I need my assistant principals working collaboratively, my instructional coaches working collaboratively, and we all must be seen as that collaborative effort, that we’re modeling that collaborative effort as much as we are talking about it.

Indeed, as another principal asserted, “You need to be involved in the process, not just assign the task and say, okay, you guys go fix this.”

The principals understood and stated that they must be life-long learners and model that for others. “I would say we are modeling for the group. Principals are learners in this process, and we’ve got to go help our folks with their learning process, so we’re always learners.” Another principal stated, “We have to model a team and then we pull in the curriculum coaches and the counselors, and we have to be able to model that and what that looks like.” This principal saw the collaborative work as the goal, not necessarily an agreement on everything or a consensus in thinking within the group.

During the unfolding of teacher collaboration, members of the focus groups suggested that a principal must help teachers overcome barriers or obstacles they might face. One principal stated, “The thing that comes to my mind mostly is all the barriers we face…it is hard for the teachers to open up and I feel my job is to create that safe environment where they will share with each other.” Another principal spoke of developing a safe environment to help teachers overcome the barrier of fear or intimidation. The safe environment must include the freedom to share their thoughts openly. This principal asserted:
I have found that I have to take care in setting up the groups to make sure that I have the right people in the place, so the conversation doesn’t head in the wrong direction. I feel my job is to create a safe environment and create the best opportunity for success.

One principal spoke of vision in the discussion of how teacher collaboration unfolded:

My role is to provide a vision of what we can be. You base that on research, as well as your personal convictions of what you could be in three to five years from now, and once you share the visions, preach the vision and preach the vision, then, after that, your role is to be a total servant and build a climate of deep moral purpose that every human being is so valuable and your contributions are so valuable.

As one principal noted, “At the end of the day, we are team builders.” Others agreed that the job of principals is to build team. They do this in roles of leaders, facilitators, and student advocates but rarely as a specialist. “There’s no way I understand all the math concepts or the reading, the diagnostic things that are required,” one principal shared, “but I have to make sure that we have the right provider and then coach them to make sure they coach the right way or teach the right way.”

The principals agreed that during the unfolding of teacher collaboration, the process evolved much more quickly and successfully after the “expectation was set and a formal structured time was put into place during the school day in which teachers would come together”, as stated by one principal.
Factor 3: Network with organizations that support teacher collaboration.

Principals noted that networking with professional organizations was a key factor in the unfolding of teacher collaboration in their schools. The opportunity to glean information and practices from existing professional networks enhanced their personal knowledge and skill sets to support the process of teacher collaboration.

Networking with professional organizations such as Bill Daggett Model Schools was the suggestion of two principals from the same district:

I think the process unfolded more so when we got involved in the Bill Daggett Model Schools. I read a lot of research, looked at different practices as far as collaboration, and thought we were doing some things to help teachers collaborate, but after Daggett, we put a program in place where a specific group of our teachers could collaborate. This is our fifth year now and we have more collaboration now with a specific group of our teachers than ever before, and it’s one of the most positive things we’ve ever done.

By getting the talk going in the Model Schools organization and providing information and everyone going out and looking at what was out there, and then developing their own wish list, a principal stated “if we could do this, and if we could do that,” and then that kind of unfolded into what the school ended up with. Therefore, it made it one of the pluses that this particular principal had many people involved who helped them get started, but were not really a part of the result:

This collaboration with other schools in Daggett’s Successful Practices Network and implementation of ideas from Daggett’s Model Schools helped us with some
of the pieces of the puzzle to successfully use collaboration among our teachers to successfully transition our freshmen into our high school.

Another group of principals noted that they had networked with the middle schools movement. One principal acknowledged,

Probably the first time I saw it (collaboration) in a formal way was when the middle school movement first started. I was a middle school principal and we started looking at the middle school programs and grooming toward that, and going to middle school national meetings, where we saw how that teaming of teachers together to deal with one group of kids had such great effect on them. In this instance, the principal at that time had wanted to form a middle school, and it adhered to the concept of teacher collaboration to facilitate that transition into a new building.

Another principal that helped develop teacher collaboration in her school did so by also developing a philosophy from the middle school movement. She stated:

The meetings that we would have with the staff, we would pick one item that we were going to develop for our upcoming handbook and I needed input from everybody. I would propose a policy on Monday and we would meet to get their input on the following Monday. And going through that process that I learned from middle school philosophy learned at state and national meetings created a vision for what we wanted our middle school to be and more importantly, gave me buy-in from our staff.

One high school principal used networking with High Schools That Work from the Southern Region Educational Board (SREB) to unfold the collaborative process. “For
us, we used the High Schools That Work model, and in that, one of the key practices is teacher collaboration. We celebrate all we do that is in line with HSTW Key Practices, including collaboration.” This principal related:

If you focus on the key practice of teacher collaboration, the teachers will begin to talk about when and how they collaborate and the discussion leads into--but there’s not enough time-- to do it like HSTW wants, so, again, studying the research based practices, you get buy-in to attempt building collaborative time in the school day.

“With High Schools That Work one can get support to train leaders, facilitators, and what principals need to be doing in team meetings to keep them productive and that’s the foundation to begin that process,” according to one participant.

Another principal mentioned that she received her early experience on the power of collaboration when networking with Arkansas Leadership Academy Team Institute:

My first experience with collaboration started as a teacher. I had the opportunity to serve on Arkansas Leadership Academy Team Institute, and I came back from that institute having gone through this team building and collaborative effort, and the first thing in my district I had had the opportunity to do, but that led into other roles and other jobs as a classroom teacher. That ultimately led me to become a coach for the leadership academy and it really gave me the confidence and the desire to become an administrator, so I had the opportunity to work on the collaborative movement as an administrator.

According to this principal, the Academy adhered to that whole concept of teacher collaboration and was effective in helping her unfold teacher collaboration in her school.
Networking with University of Arkansas Fort Smith and Educational Renewal gave one principal the understanding to unfold teacher collaboration at his school. “Two years ago we ended up in a partnership with UA Fort Smith and the Educational Renewal Effort, and it was all part of the way we reschedule to make time for teacher collaboration,” he stated. He continued with the statement, “We added a structure which included a team period in the day. After we added this team period, that’s pretty much how teacher collaboration began to unfold for us.”

The work of principals during the unfolding of teacher collaboration was supported by accessing support and training from networks using best practices and the latest research from state and national practitioners. The information indicated by the responses of principals who participated in this study is consistent with the national research on teacher collaboration. Moreover, all principals in the focus groups felt that the secondary school principal, to some degree, in some instances with changes or assistance and support, could shape most of the factors. The above factors reflect the research on teacher collaboration, which notes the wishes of principals and teachers to build a culture of trust where all members are learning and collaborating (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 2001, Reeves, 2006). In a school where collaboration saturates the culture, obstacles are overcome and cohesiveness remains intact in spite of differences between staff members (Fullan, 2001; Hord, 1997, Darling-Hammond, 1998).

**Research Subquestion 2: What Were The Major Events In The Process?**

In the process of teacher collaboration development in secondary schools, occurrences or noteworthy happenings were identified that gave support to the process. These significant or noteworthy occurrences were labeled as major events in this study.
The fact that major events usually happen in any change process is documented in the literature. Schmoker (2006), Reeves (2006) and DuFour (2004) indicate that there are purposeful events that happen in school reform as school leaders shape events and procedures to ensure teacher collaboration time in the school day. The findings of this study concur with this previous research.

Responses to focus group questions 2 and 4 indicated that principals perceived many major events had occurred during the process as teacher collaboration unfolded in their schools. The most frequent forms of collaborative practices cited in terms of major events included educational structural change such as changing the master schedule, traveling to professional meetings, conferences, or workshops to obtain research based practices, and informal meetings to discuss student progress. Principals discussed what needs to occur in terms of major events in order to move on to a new or higher level of teacher collaboration.

During the focus group discussions, principals communicated thoughts on major events that occurred during the process of developing a more collaborative culture in their schools. Principals occasionally discussed different perspectives of the same major event. The principals were in general agreement that there were major events in the process that they could remember and reflect on that supported their effort to collaborate.

The principals found ways for teachers and school staff to collaborate on significant changes to ensure building a culture that nurtured teacher collaboration and shared decision-making. The principals discussed the reformulation of roles and authority of teachers and administrators to facilitate shared decision-making, planning, as well as the implementing and monitoring of any changes. When the pieces came together
concerning the major events, administrators reported newfound enthusiasm and rapport. Statements such as “we’re a family” or “we’re in this together” were commonplace. Question 2 indicates what principals felt were major events that occurred during the process as teacher collaboration unfolded in their respective situations.

**Major event 1: Structural or personnel change.** Principals suggested that structural change or a change in personnel were major events in the unfolding of teacher collaboration. One principal spoke of how structuring time in the day gave him the buy-in from his staff that he had been looking for:

> We went from a seven period day to an eight period day. We were able to include this and structured collaborative time into a period. We had teachers that wanted to collaborate but they didn’t want to stay an hour after school two or three days a week. Scheduling the collaborative time in the school day was the real sale and it gave us buy-in.

More than one principal mentioned that moving to a new district became a major event in his collaborative experience:

> Mine was moving to a new district where a significant amount of collaborative work was taking place. The superintendent valued the input of the leadership team and this change to a new district was the major event that led me to understand that using collaboration to gather the information that leads to that final decision is a way of hearing more voices to make a better-informed decision. I learned that if there is a volume or preponderance of evidence that lends support to the final decision, then I think there is strength in that.
One principal mentioned that changing his position from teacher to principal as the major event in his collaborative development:

I think the major event in my experience was becoming a principal at a very young age. I had two or three teachers in the building in an AAAA high school that had worked longer than I had been alive, so that made me begin to realize that it’s not this top down thing that I had thought it was. And then, of course, Spock said, the good of the many outweighs the good of the one. So becoming a principal at a very young age and realizing a need for collaboration with experienced teachers was very significant in terms of a major event in the collaborative process in this example. I realized real quickly, you know, I wasn’t going to know everything and be able to tell everybody what to do.

Principals often came back to the master schedule as the one thing that had to change in structure for the development of successful teacher collaboration. One principal claimed:

The first thing you have to do after celebrating what you are doing right and have a little buy-in is create a master schedule that includes common planning time during the school day. You block out which teachers are meeting what periods, and it becomes your sacred cow. You don’t touch it. That locks it in and states that teacher collaboration within the school day is a number one priority.

Within that change in the master schedule, principals suggested improving personnel professionally by building leadership capacity every week with the leadership team in the period set in the school’s master schedule for this activity. As one principal offered, “I’m collaborating with my leadership team weekly, so that the teams they lead don’t spew off
in all these different directions. It keeps every team connected to the hub or the vision of what we’re doing.” Clearly, the leadership team must be an extension of the principal and the district vision must be included to increase the capacity to build a collaborative culture. Another principal added, “You have to really have a clear vision set in structure. What are you going to do with these team meetings you now have in your master schedule? What is the purpose of collaborating?” Thus, initial change in the master schedule must be a major change in order to change the nature of leadership in the building by increasing leadership capacity in individuals within the school.

Principal mentioned having a concrete plan as a structure in the planning process:

You have to have a concrete plan to get from point A to point B. Exactly what do you want to accomplish in a set period of time, and how are you going to know you got there? You have to have what you want to accomplish scheduled in your team meetings. If you’ve implemented a strategy, you must pull student work and your teachers look at it, and decide if the strategy worked or not. From there, you decide the next step and repeat the process, and by the end of the year, you will have decided what you made gains in, what you didn’t. That creates your plan for the following year.

A majority of the principals interviewed agreed that the plan had to be concrete and tangible objects as opposed to abstract or nebulous ideas.

**Major event 2: Professional meetings, conferences, or workshops.** Principals mentioned that traveling to professional meetings, conferences, or workshops was remembered as a major event. One principal noted, “We were able to look at successful
programs in the Successful Practices Network and then decide how we were gonna implement that program, which of course dealt with teacher collaboration.” This principal stated that “our district made the commitment that, yes, we’re gonna do this and then they supported us.” He continued to comment by adding, “We went two different times out of state and spent time at another school, looking at their program, which, in essence, gave us an idea of how we could implement their successful program at our district.”

Another principal mentioned that his introduction to teacher collaboration came from the middle school movement. “Mine was clearly the middle school movement that was being pushed around Northwest Arkansas for the first time back in the early nineties.” This principal noted that he decided to travel with his teachers in order to gain learning as a new principal and the collaboration learning emerged. “As a brand new principal in my building, I decided to take a group to the National Middle School Conference and that just kind of opened my eyes to teacher collaboration.”

Principals stated in the interviews that it was common to visit other schools and get a workshop of best practices modeled by educators in other districts. Principals went to see what other schools were doing, and then created for their district a vision of what they wanted to take place and how collaboration would “shape up” in their schools. One principal acknowledged, “We had already looked at data to get a handle on the challenges in front of us to see what we needed to accomplish based on researched best practices.” He added, “We traveled to those other schools that were using what had been revealed as some of the best practices.” Undoubtedly, learning from other educators at varying and diverse school sites was a major event for some.
One principal mentioned a workshop conducted by an expert on teacher collaboration. He stated,

I think my major event was the days and hours spent with Stephen Barkley in his model of collaboration. It was priceless for us as a building leadership team to develop a vision for our building. It also served as a comfort to know that the things we were experiencing as a building early in the process of teacher collaboration in terms of problems were common to many.

Professional meetings, conferences, and workshops were major events for principals in developing a more effective teacher collaboration process.

**Major event 3: Informal meetings.** Curiously enough, principals recalled informal meetings that were later recognized as meetings that reflected growing collaboration and could be classified as major events when they reflected on the collaborative development they had experienced:

Ours was more like we knew our goal and we really just kind of sat down and said, Okay. What does this look like? How do we get there? And so we actually were able to utilize buy-in from people to get ideas from the teachers and that buy in was a major event in the process as we developed support for the concept with people who weren’t shareholders in the end result. The fact that we included many people who were really not part of the end result was a real plus.

One principal mentioned that after informal meetings with teachers, he decided to formalize the process by organizing departmentalized meetings. This decision came about as he realized his teachers were looking for change:
Well, mine was departmentally—the departmentalized meetings that I started. That was the biggest buy-in, and that—becoming a new principal, a lot of the younger teachers were looking for a change—looking for the change that I was gonna make with the departmentalized meetings.

Possibly the most unique major event that occurred informally was when a principal attempted to resolve conflict within his math department. “We had a math department meeting about three years ago, and I brought them all in there, and we weren’t collaborating very well.” He continued, “This may sound petty, but there were personality conflicts inside the math department, and I never thought it was because they didn’t like each other, but because I don’t think they understood each other.” This principal elaborated as he stated, “When we got around the table, we just decided we were going to figure some things out that weren’t working for us at the campus level.” His determination to figure things out paid off. “By the time we got around to everybody having a chance to share their ideas, you realized that it really wasn’t a personality conflict, it was the fact they didn’t know what the other person really wanted to do.” His conclusion was that “it was a nice a-ha moment for us, because from that day forward, we’ve had great collaboration, because we came to the table, all of us just sat and just talked and heard our different opinions and views.”

One principal reflected as to how, over time, he became more familiar with his staff. As he reflected, he came to the realization that those informal conversations he held with individual teachers over a period of time were transformed from minor conversations to his major events during the unfolding process. He stated, “I believe a big piece in terms of a major event in the collaborative process is getting to know your
learners—the adult learners—the teachers. Research supports this and we’re going to move this direction in terms of building relationships.” This principal made the connection that active listening during informal conversations could play a huge role in the development of teacher collaboration. He continued his thoughts on informal conversations later becoming important by stating, “and I think being an active listener and being very careful that we listen and try to empathize, but, at the same time, help see where that learner is and what we are expecting from them in order for them to move forward on their learning continuum and actually differentiate and individualize for them, just like we expect them to do with children in the classroom is so important.” He simply believed “that active listening is a major event in the overall success of the process.”

Building relationships informally has to be a major event in the process according to the majority of the participating principals. According to one principal, “It has to be a part of your vision and included in your concrete plan.” This principal also stated that “you have to include time and specific activities to build trust, relationships, and a culture where teachers are comfortable to fail and show when they’re not—when things go well and when things don’t go well.”

One principal remembered his move to a new building in his district. He informally visited with his staff about their families and had many short conversations in an attempt to build strong working relationships with his teachers:

I was a new principal in my building, you know, and so I think a major event, perse, is just them feeling comfortable with me. This is just a me thing, you know, relationships, but I made it a point to get pictures from their families during the summer and made a PowerPoint of pictures of their families and talked a little bit
about my family, and then, you know, what the expectations of, you know, their kids would be.

This principal believed if each teacher wanted their kids to have the best education possible, then they would see the need to do that for kids that are coming through from other families:

And so I think from that, I got some positive feedback. So I guess an event is some of them realized I wasn’t this big, bad, you know, person coming in to make life difficult, but I was someone that really cared about them.

Several principals mentioned that they had informal conversations that inadvertently built a more collaborative culture during the unfolding of teacher collaboration. One principal specifically stated, “We had to decide what collaboration would mean at the operational level of the classroom?” He mentioned, “The major event for this piece was getting stakeholders involved to help us with the research, the vision, and the expectations.” At that point, he elaborated, “the work kind of shifts to the stakeholders …they become part of the actual planning at the school level… they implement, they reflect, they look at data, they get feedback, they evaluate, and then the cycle repeats from within that.” He concluded by adding, “And so getting all that to take place at the building level was a huge event in the steps to get that collaborative piece to a higher level.”

Principals agreed, after reflection, that each of them had to honor the process of collaboration. It was stated that informally, each had modeled respect for the process by their behavior and example. “The major event for me was just learning to honor the
process of collaboration, as one principal asserted.” According to this principal, “The general atmosphere when you’re starting this process, that’s important.” It was stated by another principal that “you’ve got to consider, how am I going to approach this and how am I going to deal with resistance?” This principal said one must ask:

Am I going to take it personally, am I going to have a rotten attitude, or am I going to allow for a difference of opinion and allow them to see success in getting their opinions out there so we can have success in working collaboratively.

Another principal agreed, “So it’s the approach we have to consider, I think, as a major event in the collaborative process.” Repeatedly, principals continued to recognize the day-to-day conversations and behavior they modeled in very informal ways as the major event in the process of unfolding teacher collaboration.

One principal believed emphatically that the informal conversations teachers have with each other influence the collaborative process:

I think you have a major event when teachers reach the point where they feel enough professional peer pressure, they kinda say, oh, I need to start doing this, you know, because this other person is doing a really good job, and that kind of peer pressure that motivates a teacher you didn’t think would ever collaborate goes to another teacher to seek help, that is real buy-in and they did it on their own. That’s a major event!

Thus, this principal thought a major event was when teachers started to do things without the principal having the expectation. Teachers just voluntarily did it because other teachers modeled the appropriate behavior and action.
Principals identified three major categories determined as major event factors that happening during the unfolding of teacher collaboration at their schools. The three categories were educational or personnel structural changes that occurred, traveling to professional meetings, conferences, or workshops, and informal meetings that occurred during the process that were later described as major events. These events, principals indicated, made it possible to provide the conditions necessary to support collaboration fully and successfully. Naming the major events is a beginning to understanding how to implement teacher collaboration successfully.

**Research Subquestion 3: What Were The Barriers To The Process?**

Responses to focus group questions 4, 7, and 8 revealed what barriers the principals perceived as obstacles to successful teacher collaboration. During the focus group discussions, every principal described their thoughts on the barriers to teacher collaboration that they had experienced in their schools. Many of the barriers such as lack of interaction time and lack of sensitivity to others’ roles and responsibilities were the result of overlapping factors such as principal leadership and an inadequate master schedule. Principals often had different perspectives on the same issue. The principals generally agreed that barriers are preventing collaboration from happening in ways that are most likely to lead to success in the collaborative effort. Question 3 describes the barriers to the process of teacher collaboration.

**Barrier 1: Finding time to meet/time management.** The principals in all three focus groups unanimously agreed that finding time for teacher collaboration was a barrier. Time management or finding additional time for any initiative is difficult.
“Time—I mean after the hours teachers already spend at school, it’s trying to get their time on voluntary basis or figuring out how to pay for their time after hours.”

Time management is a barrier for principals as well as teachers according to the focus group participants:

The principal must also have the time to meet. Sometimes it’s an issue to have time to be in the meetings because you’ve got other meetings or places you need to be, other trainings you need to go to. If you are not an effective manager of your time, you can’t even try to become an effective leader, and those are all barriers to collaboration.

Principals mentioned many factors, some of which are not out of their control, that take away time or cause conflicts with available time:

Emergency interruptions or schedule interruptions unexpectedly cause time management issues. A parent just drops in and they don’t necessarily understand that I have a meeting to go to. Teachers, parents, and students all want your personal attention which takes up time. I had to train everyone to call and get an appointment.

There are still emergencies for principals but many attempted to take control of the schedule instead of letting the schedule take control of them. “My schedule is not whatever others want it to be.”

One principal mentioned that she had worked in a larger school district in which there was available time to meet called late start time. Because there was enough staff to cover for teachers’ duties or responsibilities in terms of student supervision during collaborative time, the late start structure worked. She then moved to a smaller district
where financial and human resources were not available to her, and she could not implement a similar time in her new school:

In a larger district where I worked, they had enough staff where you could work out a schedule where the teachers could meet at least once a week to collaborate. In a small district where I am now, we don’t have a single person who can be in charge of all the kids in the high school during a time when all the others teachers can sit together and collaborate.

This inability to set forth collaborative time in her new school was a barrier. Scheduling a time to collaborate was a barrier to many principals because getting the right teachers together all the time is “sometimes impossible” as one principal put it.

**Barrier 2: Attitude about time.** Not only does time management become a barrier, but also according to the principals in this study, teachers’ and administrators’ attitudes about use of time often become a barrier to collaboration.

Taking that one planning time away a week just really puts them behind, you know, but they’re sacrificing too much, in their eyes. They feel like they’re going to that meeting and it’s wasted time or it’s not productive time or meaningful time, then that can be a huge barrier to move forward because they don’t see the relevance of it and how, actually, it can save them a lot of time if they experience it in a positive way. Sometimes they think they ought to be grading papers or something and whether they are productive or not doesn’t seem to matter.

In some principals’ experiences, certain times in the day had become sacred and therefore untouchable in terms of using that time to collaborate. As long as there are certain non-
negotiable times in the day, the barriers will exist to prevent maximum time for teacher collaboration:

There is emphasis put on time that is protected: the athletic time is protected, the band time is protected, and there’s all those things where, you know, don’t even go there because we’re not gonna change what we’ve been doing, you know, and the mind-set is the parents want this and the school board expects this, so there’s those barriers too. And, you know, we’ve always done it this way and so we’re not gonna change it now.

**Barrier 3: Inadequate leadership capacity.** Developing a trained leadership that has the ability to facilitate adult conversation to keep teachers on task is so important because teachers do not want to feel like it is wasted time to meet and discuss important curriculum or student needs. “There’s a skill in holding teachers accountable without always being directive in mode,” said one teacher. “I train my leadership team to analyze our group maturity so they can effectively lead the collaborative effort with me. Leadership training on the front end pays off on the back end . . . but it is time consuming.” Another said, “And so there’s a skill in coaching teachers about their lessons. You don’t just hire all these wonderful adults who have all those skills, so the capacity your leadership team has to carry out the work is so important.”

All the principals in the study suggested that developing leadership in others is difficult because the leadership capacity of collaborative leaders demands that proper human relations skills be present in order to be successful. One principal stated, “Not everyone will have the ability and skill to persevere through difficult times.” Another principal asserted, “Our people, including principals and curriculum coaches…really any
teacher leader has to have the right disposition to do the work . . . because they have to be able to work with adult learners and not take a lot of things personally.”

**Barrier 4: Resistance to change.** Resistance to change was determined to be a consistent barrier in each principal’s experience with collaborative work. “This too shall pass. Been there, done that. This is another program. I’m going to wait and ride this one out before I do anything.” Teachers develop a comfort level, a standard mode that they have been in and they are determined not to change. “I have used the same overhead sheets for thirty-five of my forty years and I’m not changing.”

Principals in the study suggested that sometimes people are resistant just because they choose to be. “There are always those people that show up and whatever the initiative, they’re against it. These are CAVE people: Citizens Against Virtually Everything!”

Implementation dips cause discomfort and create conflict which causes people to resist change and one principal suggested that “we should be celebrating that, because that means we are growing, because if everything is running very smoothly and there’s no kind of discomfort, then we’re really not moving and changing very much.” It was also suggested that there is going to be differences of opinion during growth periods, and how those differences are handled when conflict arises is most important in the process if teacher collaboration is to be successful.

It was suggested by one principal that there has been a paradigm shift in secondary education. Principals are beginning to see the possibilities of working collaboratively and this is uncomfortable for some teachers who like working in isolation and using traditional methods:
I think the term I am looking for is old paradigms—old ways of thinking builds resistance with any new idea. The way we’ve always done it, that gets in the way significantly. And people don’t like change sometimes. The naysayers, the teachers that say, oh, we tried this several years ago, do not realize it’s not the same thing—those kind of teachers and the ones that are always negative—the teachers that are always negative, that’s a definite barrier.

Tradition, pride, fear of the unknown, and fear of finding out that they, as teachers, need to improve breeds resistance, according to some principals. As teachers become embedded in a comfort zone, they often develop a fear of change. “People get comfortable and become creatures of habit. When we turned this upside down, it made many teachers extremely uncomfortable, which caused some early friction among teachers, curriculum coaches, and administrators.”

**Barrier 5: Previous success.** A barrier that one principal had encountered in one instance was the previous success of his staff. He believed that previous success prevented him from moving into a collaborative culture as quickly as he would have hoped. He stated the following mindset of many of his staff:

> I, as a teacher, already know I’ve been successful. What I am doing is working. And if you come in and you tell me another way, or even suggest that there’s another way I should be doing things, you have insulted me as a professional, because I like what I’m doing.

Another principal put that mindset into the following words:

> Well, and professional pride, self-preservation. There are people who have had success with some models and some relationships or systems and they don’t value
or see the necessity for change because the population that they may serve might be from that homogenous group standpoint, very similar to groups they have served in the past, yet all around them, other things are very different.

**Barrier 6: Facilities.** Only one principal in the three focus groups mentioned facilities as a barrier, and he mentioned this problem in the context of personnel. “When I have my departments together, the collaboration goes great, but when I get down to those last few remaining rooms and I have to have them scattered all over, it’s amazing what a difference that makes.” With this principal, the physical distance between his teachers within some departments created a barrier that was brought on by lack of facility space.

**Barrier 7: Changing or sharing staff.** A changing or sharing of teaching staff can be a barrier, according to many principals in the focus group interviews.

Growth—I think in our district, we have experienced exponential growth for several years, and that is something that gets in the way because it means you have to hire new staff. Newness—I mean you are breaking in new staff and that means all the work and training to build collaboration has to be indoctrinated into the new staff. And so we nibble around at it, before–school meetings, after-school meetings, lunch meetings, et cetera.

Another principal made a connection with the barrier of changing staff being linked to efficiency in terms of budgeting:

The tighter you get in terms of efficiency, the less diverse you can be in meeting the needs of others. I have outlier teachers who may be there just for one period a day that can’t be a part of collaborative groups just because I have to have that period of social studies in order to meet the student flow through my building.
And so, although I honor and respect efficiency in terms of physical management, of the building and the master schedule, when you share teachers it sometimes does not promote the absolute best environment for collaborative work and/or student service.

One principal in the study had a unique challenge of bridging two faculties from different schools into one faculty:

The coming together of two separate faculties and staffs made us be very careful in the placement of different groups because there are those that are very vocal about not wanting to be together, and won’t let go of the past to move into the future.

In this instance, the combination of staffs was a huge barrier, as teachers from two different schools had to begin thinking as one unit.

**Barrier 8: Relationships.** Relationships can be a barrier, according to principals in this study:

As people, we sometimes have prejudices and become judgmental with each other. Teachers criticize each other, don’t communicate well, don’t relate to each other well and that can be across your faculty, or it can the administrators from the top down who create a barrier to successful collaboration.

Another principal became very specific as he listed traits existing in a school with relationship issues:

Jealousies, envies, disrespect, you know, all the things that you deal with in a large organization. Professional arrogance is another one I recognize. For a lack of a better term, it’s emotional issues related to character or deeper things that
have to be worked on before you can work on logistical things like a master schedule.

One principal specifically stated that competitive relationships create a school climate that is not conducive to successful teacher collaboration:

One of the barriers that keeps the high school faculty from working with the middle school faculty is competitiveness. They compete to see which one can be better. And sometimes high school staff may look back and say you’re not sending us the product we need to make progress. Each building may be saying I can do this better than you. It can even be competitiveness within the school where English teachers may say we teach better than the math teachers. When it is too competitive, they become possessive and think their way of doing it is the right way and the only way to do it.

**Barrier 9: Lack of money.** A veteran and well-respected principal in this multi-case study emphatically stated that lack of money would prevent teacher collaboration from becoming the hope of secondary education. He suggested that if money did become available to support the teachers in a collaborative effort, teacher collaboration might become the paradigm that stabilizes secondary education in public schools. “I really believe if we want to make a substantial change in education to provide a collaborative environment, it is gonna take money—okay?” He was adamant as he stated, “If we could put in place a program at all secondary schools where teachers had a conference period that they take of the things that they always have been taking care of;” and, he continued, “once a week there would also be a mandatory time where they come together for
The principal continued as he pressed the issue:

The question is what are we willing to do as a district, as a state, as a nation? Are we willing to focus on that and realize that, yes, when you take teachers and you put them together and they can work on a project, you’re going to see higher outcomes?

This principal became more assertive as he asked, “Are we willing to go down that road?” He continued by acknowledging, “Districts have to deal with teachers who have issues with not being paid because they’re having to work during conference period.”

This principal’s conclusion was that more money was needed for effective teacher collaboration, “The structure of education itself, if we could change that to allow for teachers to collaboratively come together and pay them for it, it would be great.”

The issue of money is equated with purchasing time. One principal commented that the collaborative time is literally a money issue:

Time is money, literally. It will take money to buy teachers’ time to give them collaborative time embedded in the school day. It won’t be quite as efficient which superintendents won’t like, but we have to decide if philosophically we really believe in a collaborative culture. Building a collaborative culture will take time and finances—that’s what we’re talking about here.

The principals in this study indentified nine barriers to teacher collaboration in their schools. They were finding time to meet/time management, attitude about time, not having enough leadership capacity, previous success, resistance to change, facilities, a
changing or sharing of teaching staff, relationships and lack of money. These barriers, principals indicate, make it difficult to provide the proper conditions necessary to support collaboration in manner consistent with what is needed to be enormously successful. Identifying the barriers is useful to understanding how to confront and overcome them.

Research Subquestion 4: Who Were The Important Participants? How Did They Participate?

Responses to focus group questions 4 and 5 identified the people involved and the extent of their involvement. Principals’ responses indicated that they perceived several reasons as to how the participants participated. Findings in this question indicated participants were beginning to take ownership in teacher collaboration. The data showed the participants started to be open in discussions. The respect they showed one another and the openness in their conversations indicated that an element of trust developed within the groups collaborating.

This question represents the feelings of the participants and the level of commitment to the collaborative work, to each other and to those that were not so willing to participate. The findings indicate that the participants respected one another and valued each other’s opinions, even if they were different from their own. Many noted that they felt supported by their colleagues, and as they collaborated with other participants, the understanding of the key components of collaboration emerged, namely respect, trust, working on common goals, and getting feedback in order to revise processes.

Many participants indicated how the collaborative atmosphere had affected their own feelings about the creation of professional relationships with one another in a
positive way. Question 4 describes the important participants in the teacher collaboration process.

**Important participants 1: Principals/administrators.** Every principal publicly acknowledged the necessity of principal and administrative leadership in developing a collaborative culture. “In my personal situation, it started with me, like what we were talking about, you know, I was involved in the process. Because, again, they had to see that I was buying into it before they would.”

An individual in the interview process mentioned his leadership as he began to realize he was presented with the priority of developing more leaders in his building. He acknowledged that his participation and the participation of a respected teacher leader would give support to the effort:

And then for scheduling purposes, we had two different meeting times, so it was critical for me to find that person that could also be that leader, that facilitator, you know because we knew if myself and the facilitator would buy into the process, the teachers would buy into it as well.

Principals would occasionally reflect to their first experiences with collaboration. That was often at a time when he/she was in the classroom. One principal remembered the importance of her principal leading the collaborative effort, “Our administrative support from the principal was so necessary when I first started in the collaborative effort. It helped me understand the importance of principal support and leadership in the collaborative effort when I became a principal.”

Another principal observed that leadership in collaboration could not be delegated. This principal commented, “As a principal, it’s really important to model and
to structure that team environment so you create norms.” He added that “once someone
shares airspace—some people tend to dominate the whole conversation and some people
are great listeners and they don’t say a word, but they have something to contribute.” The
same principal suggested, “Just structuring and putting the processes and protocols in
place to help teachers learn how to share time, and listen respectfully to each other, and
learn those skills . . . can make a huge difference.” He believed at this point “they then
get the a-ha of how great collaborative time can be and how we can learn from each
other.” Another principal stated, “Principals are so essential in helping everyone learn the
roles in collaboration—such as the role of curriculum coaches. Also, the role of central
office and the trust they placed in us to carry out this effort was invaluable.”

One important participant who was mentioned was the Superintendent. According
to one principal, if the Superintendent is not involved and supportive, the work will be
greatly hampered:

You won’t have a structure or an expectation for this in your building if you don’t
have a superintendent that is an instructional leader and who makes collaboration
a priority, who makes it an expectation, and who is willing to budget for it, and
support that, and train for it, to build that kind of understanding at the school
board level, so that you can take on this sort of initiative to recruit and to build
that sort of capacity with the principals.

This principal went on to say, “It takes a district support staff, an assistant superintendent
with the curriculum people and the special program supervisors and things like that.”

**Important participants 2: Counselors.** One principal stated that counselors had
played an important role as participants in teacher collaboration. She suggested that
counselors made a statement that everyone was needed for a complete collaborative
culture. It was also noted by this principal that the presence of counselors sent a message
that the environment would be safe for everyone to share their thoughts and ideas:

We had counselors in our team meetings, and that’s a really important part of our
initiative. So much of ours is all equal ground. I mean, we need everybody and I
feel like the counselors leant credibility to that need for everyone to be involved
and feel it was safe.

**Important participants 3: Instructional facilitators/curriculum coaches.** It is
critical to find that leader that can facilitate the collaborative work according to many
participating principals. For example, one stated, “We felt it was important to find that
leader among our own teaching staff so it would more likely to get other teachers to buy
in to this effort.” If these facilitators are successful, the work becomes so exciting that
teachers often become involved with the effort and the idea of who is in charge becomes
less of an issue, according to another participant: “We had facilitators in the beginning,
but that soon falls aside because everyone got excited when they discovered a common
interest and it was determined that we all had needs to be met in our collaborative team
meetings.”

Other principals viewed the facilitator as a content specialist that could give
deeper knowledge and skill to teachers in a specific content area:

Literacy Specialists were a huge part for me in helping with the collaborative
effort of our school, because they bring that content knowledge . . . to help inform
the group so they can make adaptations to their content, whatever it might be.
The expertise of a content specialist during the collaborative process gives confidence that the strategies will really make a difference in the daily work, according to principals:

I’ve had curriculum coaches lead the way—just people that have the expertise, putting those right pieces in the right place. Any instructional leader that has good instructional strategies to share could lead teacher collaboration and improve our work in the classroom.

One principal voiced her excitement in having curriculum coaches because their participation in the process had been so valuable in her experience. As she encountered other professionals, she learned that not everyone had been so fortunate to have a broader base of leadership to support the collaborative process:

Those facilitators—curriculum coaches—are important participants. I have traveled across the state and my other secondary colleagues are saying, oh, my gosh, if we could only have curriculum coaches in our building, or if we had those kind of facilitators, so we don’t want to forget about them as important participants.

The knowledge base of a competent curriculum coach gives a much broader base of support in developing a collaborative culture. Principals agreed that collaboration is rarely developed successfully by a single principal.

**Important participants 4: Informal teacher leaders/veteran teachers.** It was very common to hear principals in this study suggest that one must get the natural leaders on board:

And that’s what I did, is took my strength, my natural leaders on the faculty, and took them to all the places I needed to take them to get them to buy in, rather than
push it on them, and then I didn’t have to sell that much anymore, they sold it for me.

Most principals could reflect on a specific natural leader that had given him/her assistance:

Well, I’m thinking of, you know, one in particular teacher, a veteran teacher that is a thinker, you know, and I think that the other teachers respect that person, and as that person was going through the team meetings and providing input in that particular team meeting, everyone else said they could see it was okay. Well, you know, look there, he’s participating. He’s sharing and bringing thoughts in. And again, that little peer pressure there, that raises the bar for that whole team meeting and sets the positive tone for collaboration.

One principal thoughtfully suggested that each secondary school probably had one person in each department that potentially could rise to the level of a natural leader, “I’m thinking we all have that one teacher in each department that is a key person—that you get them to buy in, the others will follow.”

Interestingly, one principal noted that athletic coaches had become leaders in the collaborative effort just because they honestly supported the effort. Traditionally, it was suggested that teachers often do not view athletic coaches as willing participants in most academic initiative. For the principal, that participation by athletic coaches set a very positive tone within the staff at her school:

I think some of my best participators were athletic coaches and they broke the stereotype of athletic coaches not being real teachers. I found that athletic coaches have extremely meaningful things to say that contribute to the conversation and
those stereotypes were broken down and we became so much more collaborative.

We began to trust each other more in the group as a whole. I just like the fact that barriers between teachers got broken down, and we developed a healthy respect for different styles of teaching and for each other, as professionals.

Informal leaders and veteran teachers set a great example for collaboration when they model collaborative behaviors:

I even have teachers go during their prep time and visit other teachers’ classrooms and watch the learning taking place, and then reflect on that, and they were amazed at what went on in a music classroom, or what went on that was good teaching and learning, and all research-based, but they had no idea before we began to emphasize collaboration. It was really neat to see that and see that dialogue and respect for all teachers, and that professionalism which is so critical to the process.

One principal suggested that natural leadership could come from almost anywhere within the school. It was suggested that sometimes it is surprising who might step up, but in all instances, the natural leadership demonstrated was an encouragement to other teachers:

There’s natural leadership in all areas. Some of it is formal, but some of it is informal, and some of the informal leaders may be the best in terms of positive influence—and as a principal, you can sometimes coach those people into more formal leadership roles in your school—things like department chair or whatever leadership model title you have in schools, because people come to them naturally anyway because of the success they have in their classrooms. The people are
“master teachers” without the title. People automatically go to them for advice. The evidence of their success is usually student success and other people want to mirror that, if at all possible, and so those are natural things. If you can get these people in formal leadership roles and they are the right fit—that is a positive thing.

**Important participants 5: All teachers.** One principal strongly suggested that teacher collaboration should abide by the rule that everyone will participate.

You know, since it is about collaboration, I like the 100% rule because I think they all have to be willing participants. And, again, back to the whole idea that there is strength in numbers, to think that I could make all the decisions for every kid and teacher that walks into our building, that’s ludicrous to think. It takes all teachers to have a successful collaborative effort.

Another principal, although not guaranteeing one hundred percent, still maintained that the success obtained in that particular school was a direct result of all teachers as they unselfishly participated in the collaborative effort. “The teachers were probably the most important participants because they were the ones who ultimately decided to work together to become better teachers and learners.”

In summary, the findings from this question identified the participants including principals/administrators, counselors, instructional facilitators/curriculum coaches, informal teacher leaders/veteran teachers, as well as all other teachers in some cases. The results showed that the participants looked forward to collaborative time, developed relationships where they were receptive to the ideas of others, took ownership of the collaborative process, and developed trust in each other and the group as a whole. The
findings showed that the participants understood collaboration to be an important part of professional practice where teachers work together towards a common goal for the benefit of students. In addition, participants demonstrated their willingness to share the practice of collaborative work with the whole faculty and other interested groups.

**Research Subquestion 5: How Were The Program Participants (Teachers) Changed By The Process? How Were The Non-Program Participants (Other Teachers, Staff, Administrators, Etc.) Changed By The Process?**

Focus group questions 4, 6, 11, and 12 were used to identify how the process changed the program participants as well as how the process may have changed those that did not participate.

Because of the atmosphere created by teacher collaboration, participants described a feeling of be able to be open with colleagues, which is an indication of developing trust and the forming of positive relationships. Setting an atmosphere where one can be frank and open with people is important and especially helpful to new staff members who may be changed from new person to respected peer in the proper collaborative culture.

Some principals described feeling less isolated because of the process and others echoed that. Other principals even discussed a transformation of their staff from isolated to very collaborative. Some participants suggested that reflection of how teachers practice their profession increased and how people worked together was a positive. It was mentioned that learning at a high school is not just department oriented and there are many ways in which participants share common ground and lots of ways that if they work together and not in isolation, there are things each teacher may do differently.
because they do not duplicate and work against each other. It was discussed that working with other professionals enriches one’s own professional life and one can learn from each and every person that might be in the room in a way that enriches one as an individual and makes one a better person.

Consistent in the findings was the desire of the participants to create opportunities for the whole faculty to experience the collaboration experienced by others who had found fulfillment and success in the collaborative process. In fact, it was mentioned that many non-participators became participators after witnessing the success of those early participators. Question 5 describes how the teacher collaboration process changed program participants as well as how the process changed non-program participants.

**Change in program participants 1: Transformation of teachers.** Teacher collaboration created a complete transformation of some teachers, according to principals in the study:

I’ve seen some of them totally transform from being on the far side of being, say, really not effective with kids at all to someone who is a good, solid teacher who really moved to the forefront, both with their peers and with their interaction with kids too, so kind of across the board change is what I’ve seen.

Another principal made this comment about one of his teachers. “Mine was just astounding. Wow, this works, would be said. When they saw themselves how much it worked, it inspired them to continue, and the others came on board, seeing the success.”

Yet another participant echoed the comments concerning transformation of individual teachers.
Changes in teachers can be huge using the collaborative process. People that are very—start out where they are in their learning continuum, very narrow minded, they’ve taught one way all these years, and it has worked, and that’s what they think, as they’re exposed to different thoughts in a respectful manner, and different ways of doing things, and maybe even a little action research, trying it just to see how it works—but once they try it and something works and they have an a-ha, and then they share that, it’s just—it’s a catalyst that keeps growing, and it’s very—it’s magic when that happens, and then you see transformation in adult learners and they do change, and it’s very exciting.

One principal stated that he had observed the same tremendous transformation in individual staff members and that same change could happen to others if the principal would not hold past offenses against teachers. “I believe in miracles,” he said. “If someone really goofed up last year, maybe last year they didn’t do good, but maybe there’s been a transformation. You’ve got to allow people to grow and not hold grudges or what happened last year against your teachers.” He asserted, “I mean, you can’t just keep holding something over their head because they may have some things they do much better than other things, but they do have some great points.” His conclusion was that “I don’t need to throw everything out just because of one bad aspect.”

Change in program participants 2: Eye-opening experiences for teachers.

Some principals in the study mentioned the excitement when a teacher experiences new learning and the power obtained by collective thinking as an eye-opening moment. One described the eye-opening experience with the following statement:
I think what my folks really learned, that being collaborative with about a million
different people, versus just maybe talking to one other teacher, was an eye
opening experience because they had never done it—now they’re trying to feel
out who’s needing what, where are they at, what’s going on with them, and they
had to kind of see it in a different light. They saw now maybe, Gosh, me being
collaborative with all these people, I’ve got to know more about this. They had to
build relationships they hadn’t had in the past.

Another principal mentioned how a young natural leader had his eyes opened to the
power of collaboration and went on to becoming an even better leader. “I think of
somebody in particular who said, Wow, this is more than I thought it was, so it was a
very eye-opening experience for this person.” This principal suggested that it “was a
young leader taking a big step towards being a better leader, which is building
relationships with folks they had not really worked with before.”

For one principal, it was eye opening to principal participants to come to the
realization that collaboration served as an unofficial mentoring program in their
respective schools.

I think our teachers became so excited because they watched how that sharing of
how we practice our work helped first year teachers become much better teachers
almost immediately because of being in this environment where they can share,
where they can talk. I believe it was an eye-opening experience when we realized
that having collaborative time on a regular basis actually served as an informal
induction of new teachers by placing support all around them on an ongoing,
regular basis, applied to their daily work and embedded it in the school day.
Change in program participants 3: Increase in self-efficacy. Principals noted that teacher collaboration produced the desired effects of teachers improving professional behaviors such as becoming more confident and competent in their work. As teachers became more confident and competent, their morale and attitudes improved as they learned from others and they felt better about themselves. Participating principals noted these changes in the self-efficacy of participants as they became more immersed in teacher collaboration. One principal observed, “Its maturity, leadership, confidence, and competence that grows. I’ve just witnessed those people grow and go into other leadership roles. It’s phenomenal because their self-efficacy that they experienced is the way it should be.” He added, “There should be growth everyday. Every opportunity, we should be growing from it.” Another principal put it in different terms, but self-efficacy was still the theme: “Teachers who may not respond or open up have really good ideas and in small collaborative meetings, they may share and the whole group will think they have a really good idea.” He continued, “And the teacher that never says a word all of a sudden has respect from the entire staff because teachers share that good idea.”

According to this principal, “The quiet teacher that no one ever paid attention to in the past now has respect and begins to contribute more because she realized she had something important to contribute. I actually witnessed this with my staff.”

Yet another principal in the study noted that teacher collaboration, when working properly, finds ways to celebrate successes of the staff and students. Celebrations create positive attitudes and positive attitudes build efficacy.

Collaboration gave them a lot of confidence, and I think they feel comfortable knowing that we’re gonna celebrate our successes, no matter how minor. I mean,
we’ll celebrate some of what you would think were the most insignificant things, but it could very well be something about an individual student, and we have tried so hard to make just a little bit of growth with that particular student and/or family, and all of a sudden somebody walks in and, you know, here they go, they’ve go to praise, and, you know, we want to celebrate that. It feels great to celebrate success! People get on board when they feel good about some good things that are happening.

**Change in program participants 4: Participants become more reflective.**

Qualitative data obtained from one principal in the interview process revealed a more reflective attitude by those that experienced the collaborative culture. She asserted that becoming more reflective in the art and science of teaching was definitely a change she observed in teachers participating in collaboration.

I have an exit conference, one on one with each of my teachers at the end of the year. Eighty, ninety percent of the teachers said, I think about teaching a totally different way. I think in the past, we created lessons and we taught it, hope you get it, you know, and that’s it. We taught it, I covered it. Well, they should know it. But most of them said, I think differently about it now. I taught it, and then where’s my proof that they actually got it? Which kids do I need to go back, and which skills do I need to go back and teach, and how can I teach it? How can I teach tomorrow’s lesson better than today? So maybe it’s just a continual state of reflection that without this time to collaborate, teachers never think to stop do that, the pace is so fast.
It was suggested that the reflective nature built into the teacher collaboration process builds more confidence in teachers to ask tough questions. As one principal stated, “My teachers feel more comfortable bringing something to my attention that could help the staff, rather than don’t even ask for it because it’s not gonna happen anyway.” This principal related that “I see them reflecting on the excitement of good things that have happened due to our shared decision making and collaborative work, so they feel more comfortable to take on new challenges.”

**Change in non-program participants 1: The resistant teacher changes.** One notable change in non-program participants from one principal was the recognition that a resistant teacher could be changed to a team player. This principal witnessed a non-participant staff member becoming a participant in the teacher collaboration process.

This person will be dead set against working together and will tell me, this ain’t gonna work. And when I had a chance to explain to him and we had the group setting, the group started saying, No, man listen. Try this. It has worked in our classrooms. Then once he tried this deal, and it wasn’t just me saying it, because he wouldn’t have done it if it was just me saying it, but when he got a chance to finally do it, he came to realize, you know what? You were right, and then walked off. But you know it wasn’t about me being right. He had a chance to listen to his peers because we were all sitting together at the same table. It took time, but he was definitely a non-participant in these conversations, and he is now a participant.

Another testimony about how resistant teachers can change came from a principal working solely with freshmen. In this instance, teachers of upper high school grades had
been somewhat resistant to the collaboration that had developed in this school. This principal stated,

In our case, we had collaboration in a freshman academy setting with our teachers. And I think it was our upper level teachers who were non-participants in the high school that expected us to fix all the problems before the kids got to them. I think the mindset was for us to fix the problems and then they wouldn’t have to deal with them when the kids got to their classes. It was like, well, it’s all gonna be taken care of, because they saw that we had high expectations of our freshmen and so hopefully, they would be better upper classmen.

In this principal’s opinion “the mindset that we would fix the problem made them resistant to taking part in the collaborative process, but as we had success, that began to drastically change.”

**Change in non-program participants 2: Reluctant teachers are brought along.** Participants in the focus group acknowledged that not all teachers who do not join the teacher collaboration initiative should be considered resistant. Some are just reluctant to get involved, for a variety of reasons. One principal suggested this view of reluctant teachers.

And so there are some times those people who may appear to be resistant to change when, in fact, they’re just trying to understand better. Those people that are reluctant view change for change’s sake meaningless and are not early adopters of every new thing. They want to be better informed. They want to know it’s the right thing. So I work hard to be more clear in what I’m saying, to give
and provide better information so that they can be better consumers of the information.

One principal spoke of the value that should be placed on those colleagues that sometimes question our initiatives:

I value those people that ask the hard questions, because it makes me more reflective, and as long as I set the tone and lead they tone by answering those hard questions, I usually can stifle the adversarial behavior and bring the reluctant people along if I answer and deal with the hard questions.

In this study, one principal reflected on a specific employee that he deemed as a reluctant participant. By not overreacting to the reluctant attitude, this principal saw some gains in this particular teacher’s willingness to work with others. “One of my coaches comes to mind. He’s been with me 31 years, and it is the only place he has ever taught. He is an outstanding coach, great with kids, but he’s always got the brakes on.” Nevertheless, the principal acknowledged, “I find that guy implementing these things quietly because they work, but he’s not going to admit buying in. But he sees what works.”

All principals agreed that non-participants should be given the same information as the participants. By honoring all colleagues as professionals, principals believed good could come from the effort:

I think it is important that non-participants have information. In the absence of information, you have opportunity for chaos to reign. So if you provide them information, even though they may not be particularly participating in the collaborative effort, my experience has shown me it is helpful in bringing reluctant people along.
Principals continued with this thinking by making comments about a collaborative environment. The feeling of principals was that if the environment were truly collaborative in nature, non-participants would not be left out. One principal stated, “Once you provide non-participants information, you create an environment where they felt like they have an opportunity to provide input, and to me, collaboration is just developing ownership.” He elaborated by asserting that “if someone has an investment, an ownership in it, you’re going to get much more out of that person and their work than you would if they did not feel like they had ownership in it.” He concluded the following about non-participants:

You’ve got to make them have a sense of what’s going on, so that they have information. That way, they can, if someone asks, know what’s going on and [be] much more likely to become a full participant. They can say, Well, I know what they are talking about.

Other principals in this study believe the reluctant participants will come along simply because they do not wish to be left behind by their friends and colleagues. As one principal noted, “It’s like, well, hey, I’m gonna be left behind, you know. It kinda forces them to kinda step up a notch.”

**Change in non-program participants 3: Moving a non-participant to a participant strengthens the effort.** The participating principals in this study all believed that the collaborative effort was tremendously boosted when a non-participant became an active participant:

They may not volunteer to be a participant. They may not have been one you’ve chosen to be part of a particular team for a particular reason. Generally, you
identify the issues with that person and try to provide information and support for
them in order to gain their support. They may volunteer to join the group. And
when they do that, then I think that just strengthens your effort and what you’re
trying to do.

A principal who believed it imperative to look for and support employees reaching
burnout cited one specific example. “The systems we work in, I think you can overload
people and burn them out. They lose focus and you have to be sensitive to that.” He
concluded, “Sometimes, finding ways to give that support to those that appear to be burnt
out is all it takes to bring them over to your side. And when that happens, it is powerful.”

**Change in non-program participants 4: Including non-participants from
staff other than teachers can be helpful in teacher collaboration.** Noteworthy in the
discussion with principals was the suggestion that a truly collaborative culture would be
inclusive of staff members outside the teaching realm:

> It’s interesting to bring into your meetings the nontraditional people, thinking
about like maybe the custodian, the bus driver, and they will amaze you. You get
their input and it’s refreshing when they feel a part of it, and they feel respected,
and it’s just not I’m just picking up trash, but they realize, hey, I play a role in the
education of this child.

Moreover, it just changes the atmosphere when this happens with the non-certified staff,
according to this principal. It was not suggested that they necessarily had to be included
in teacher professional development or strategy development, but that the specifics of
inclusion might have to be creative. The important principle to this principal was that a
collaborative culture was good for all employees of a school site.
One principal remembered that those who had been left out noticed leaving the counseling staff and clerical staff out of the collaborative meetings, and it was brought to the principal’s attention:

The first year we had these team meetings with teachers every week, and at first it was difficult, and then the positive buzz, you know, was there. And then I had my counseling team and I had my office team that said why aren’t you meeting with us? And so, then for the next year, I built two or three other non-instructional staff meetings that I’m going to try and hit. These groups didn’t feel connected and requested that time.

Yet another principal mentioned how leaving media specialists out of teacher collaboration produced a negative effect on the effort:

The media specialists had this dialogue about being left out and disconnected and not knowing what the teachers were doing, and wishing that they were a part of that collaboration, because they want to support certain teachers, but they feel like they’re being left behind with what the teachers are doing instructionally and therefore they don’t know how to support it. And so that was an oversight where we had non-participants.

Perhaps the most common component of school-based reform found in this study was the positive change brought about by organized efforts to increase interaction and communication among teachers using a collaborative process. This collaboration among teachers and between school administrators and their entire staff is a central strategy in developing effective schools. Research shows that unusually effective schools are marked by behavior that is more positive as communication becomes more productive,
information becomes more available to all, and collaboration among teachers is increased (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Schmoker, 2006). The shift to shared decision-making, responsibility, and authority creates new opportunities for many school staff. On issues surrounding curriculum and instruction, teachers bring their expertise and classroom experience to the table.

There are challenges to provide collaboration in planning and teaching for all staff members. Some are resistant or reluctant to become involved and some non-participants are outside the mainstream of teaching and are sometimes left out of the effort. The principals agreed that providing information for all and encouraging all to participate in the collaborative process as essential to promoting teacher collaboration.

The principals in this study discussed the changes in participants and non-participants within their schools as the collaborative process unfolded and matured. It was discovered that the changes in participants included a transformation of teacher participants from non-collaborative to collaborative, teacher participants’ had eye-opening experiences about teacher collaboration, teacher participants had increased self-efficacy when involved with teacher collaboration and teacher participants became more reflective when participating in teacher collaboration. Non-participants, it was discovered, included teachers resistant to change that could be changed to participants and reluctant teachers that could be motivated to become participants. It was further discovered that the collaborative process was strengthened when non-participants became participants, and bringing in non-participants from outside the teaching staff (counselors, librarians, aides, non-certified staff, etc.) was instrumental in building a very collaborative culture.

Focus group questions 3, 4 and 9 revealed that the principals who participated in this study acknowledged several leadership strategies that they used to support teacher collaboration in their schools. Several of the strategies were stated as successfully encouraging teacher collaboration. These strategies are described in detail within this section.

There are leadership strategies that support teacher collaboration in spite of the realization that professional learning communities with embedded collaboration seem to remain little more than an elusive aspiration in many schools. Although the data indicate multiple strategies principals may use to promote collaborative practices, many remain mired in traditional norms of teacher individuality and organizational isolationism. The impediments to sustaining norms of professional collaborative practice seem as troublesome today as they did decades ago (Lortie, 1975; Reeves & Allison, 2009).

Many teachers continue to depict severe limitations in the capacity to work meaningfully with colleagues in ways that allow them to address the common goal of enhanced student achievement. Teachers still complain that the scarcity of opportunities to collaborate is brought on by increasing work demands and decreasing time availability (Schmoker, 2006). They also continue to lament persisting negative mindsets about the actual desirability of shared work and the resistance to moving beyond the traditional models of teacher relationships. Although some schools seem to be headed by administrators who value and promote professional learning communities, others clearly are not (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).
Attempts at school improvement cannot be individual and fragmented but rather must be embedded in the school day with collaborative strategies that address the day-to-day needs of students and teachers (Lopez, 2002). School principals must creatively juggle schedules and identify resources that are used to free up teachers for collaborative work. If habitual teacher practice is valued, it should be a certain expectation that is clearly espoused in policy and at the highest administrative levels. Making provisions for teachers to work together during and outside school hours may indeed require reallocated resources or other measures, but it must be done just as some various practicing principals in Northwest Arkansas have done it. Question 6 describes the strategies secondary principals use to support teacher collaboration.

**Strategy 1: Set norms for teacher collaboration.** One of the most often mentioned strategies that principals used was to set norms for teacher collaboration. For example, one principal stated, “When we started this process; and we got our groups of teachers together, we established the set of norms as a collective group.” He stated, “If you have structure that you’re gonna follow, then it makes a world of difference because you stay on task.” His conclusions was “not only do you get structure from setting norms, but you also gain accountability when the group has to behave by a set of standard expectations.”

Another principal spoke of specific expectations in their collaborative meeting time: “Our norms always include a positive attitude, and that has made a difference with us because …we had to refer back to our norms or what we were actually trying to do.” Yet another principal specifically noted that norms support effective use of time. She stated, “They [the teachers] don’t want us to waste their time and they don’t want to
come in there and just meet so the norms help us stay focused.” Another principal also mentioned that one norm should always be the active participation of the principal: “One very important norm is for the principal to practice what they preach by participating in the collaborative process and going into the battle with your folks.”

To one principal, the most important norm was to make sure the collaborative time was structured during the school day. He asserted,

The main thing we agreed to is we will be there on time, and it doesn’t matter how many times you have to call a teacher meeting during the week, even if you have to do it three times a week, we’ll be there, as long as we don’t have to do it after school.

**Strategy 2: Provide human and material resources.** Providing support through human and material resources was very important to several of the principals. They agreed that teachers are bogged down in all the other daily routines of school and it really does help when the principal or a district level person can focus on specific functions such as modeling teaching, giving feedback, or providing materials.

One material resource that some principals felt to be important for teachers was good data. One principal related,

We provide data from successful efforts. When our teams see the success we are having, it causes people to want to continue to get that data to make more data-driven decisions about how to work on an idea in another area or in some other fashion . . . . I think being able to use the data provided by other administrators or personnel has made a big difference. That type of support is huge because it saves
the teachers’ time. They come to the conclusion, well, why wouldn’t we continue this collaboration because it is successful.

Many principals mentioned the importance of providing quality human resource support personally, as they model the practices they want their teachers to implement. This strategy paid dividends in terms of spreading best practices. One principal shared,

I think the greatest support I have seen for our teacher collaboration is seeing other principals model the kind of learning theory, or learning behavior, or learning practices that they want to see in the classrooms and those team meetings. They model and practice what they want to see, which is huge support to the teachers.

Another principal used student surveys as a material resource to help his teachers plan:

Ours is a partnership. We supplied the teachers with surveys about what students thought were good and bad things going on in each teacher’s classroom. Although there was some criticism, that information we provided was helpful in setting the stage in building a safe and non-threatening environment as we learned to work together on difficult problems. We try to supply information to our teachers that will help them improve.

In this study, it was common to hear principals speak of themselves as resources or servants to the teaching staff. One principal shared,

As principal, I had to serve as a resource to build collaboration between teachers that were put together from two different buildings. The dynamics of starting of with teachers from two different buildings was difficult, but I felt that being a human resource to my teachers and teacher leaders was a very important strategy.
She summarized by stating, “I felt that I was able to build a strong relationship with both groups of teachers which was a key strategy in building a collaborative culture in my school.”

Technology support was related as a strategy to help in teacher collaboration. Technology support for teacher collaboration included human support to help with software or hardware problems, ample technology supplies, and appropriate technology equipment. As one principal spoke to that support, he shared, “We provided technology and technology support to help our teachers learn to do management things more quickly, so we could get to the collaborative piece without losing so much time.”

A common theme among principals was the hiring of substitute teachers to give relief time to teachers for training or collaborative time with their colleagues. Although it was mentioned as an expensive resource, all principals remembered times when they had to hire a substitute to allow teachers time to attend professional development or meet with their colleagues: “We often have to provide substitute teachers for teachers to get the professional development they need.”

**Strategy 3: Distributed leadership.** Every principal in the study communicated the need to increase leadership capacity using the strategy of distributed leadership. One principal suggested that distributed leadership helps those participating realize they are improving themselves as they share their knowledge and expertise.

We have to distribute the leadership in our team meetings and in our professional development work. When they’re able to start leading what we’re doing in team meetings and leading our professional development efforts, they’re having those self-realizations that they are improving and becoming leaders and they realize
they have to improve more and begin to act on the idea of learning to share that knowledge and skill with others.

Another principal stated the following comment concerning distributed leadership. “When teachers start acting on their own improvement needs and share their new learning with others that is a strategy than can be duplicated and rippled out to the entire building.” This principal saw distributed leadership as a way to model appropriate collaboration with colleagues, thereby, increasing leadership capacity within the school.

Another principal mentioned that improvement could be readily observed after a time using distributed leadership. He felt that trust developed among the teachers as they received increased support from the distributed leadership.

When teachers start feeling comfortable going to those curriculum coaches and say, I’m having a problem doing this cooperative learning with my students. How do I do that? That interaction between a curriculum coach and a teacher and that trust that they’ve built, you may never know that, but you will see the changes when you go into their classroom. And I think that is a dimension of distributed leadership that just supports the whole idea of teacher collaboration.

Distributed leadership also gives support to aligning the curriculum and instruction in a school:

Providing for total instructional alignment where you have different leaders from each school working together and those teachers are seen working together, the rest of the faculty sees those teachers working together so that is very positive. Total instructional alignment builds a team atmosphere by doing shared work. It takes time and money to provide that kind of support to teacher collaboration.
The strategy of distributed leadership caused one principal to reflect on the idea that research based strategies were more likely to be implemented because the base of knowledge was much broader using distributed leadership as more teachers become learners and have to think about lessons from the perspective of a learner:

I think one of the most beneficial strategies we used was creating opportunities for teachers to begin learning the content as a learner, thinking about the content as a learner, and seeing how that learning plays out in the classroom. This concept was developed with our principals and curriculum coaches using research to develop their own solutions to classroom problems in collaborative meetings. As these skills and opportunities were distributed to teachers in the team meetings, all of a sudden we had research based strategies being implemented at the level of the classroom because we had all become better adult learners.

This principal further spoke of how the distributed leadership began to embed professional development and learning into the school day: “Our modeling, our coaching approach and our professional learning is embedded in our culture in a way that the coach and the teacher develop that model classroom.” She also commented,

Those other teachers have a place in their own building where they can see the practice and study and learn and then carry what they want to their own classroom for immediate implementation and practice. And I think that is a really important strategy.

**Strategy 4: Hire the right people.** Hiring the right people is the most important part of providing human resource support to the collaborative process, according to some principals that participated in this study:
When I interview for prospective teachers, assistant principals, curriculum coaches or anyone, I talk to them about collaboration. How do you feel about that? How do you feel about being a facilitator? And so I think we are trying to identify people that have a positive attitude about what we are wanting to do with collaboration before we even bring them on board. If you do that, it is a great strategy to support the collaborative process.

**Strategy 5: Empowerment.** Empowerment of a teaching staff that has the desire to improve will enhance the culture of collaboration:

I think the leadership teams that we have in all our buildings recognized the pull from a principal’s standpoint and they know their responsibilities, and I don’t try to micro manage what they do. I trust my people to do the right thing, based on our regular conversations, and if there is anything in question that they have about a decision that has to be made, they run it past each other, they run it past me. They are almost always right and so I say go for it.

A principal suggested that after building the proper environment for teachers to collaborate, they had to be given empowerment to improve the school:

Once you have established that kind of relationship with the people at the first tier, again—they are the leaders—they are the primary leaders of collaboration in my building because they are the ones out there every day rubbing elbows and shoulders with their peers and they’re the ones who bring others along and make the big wake. I make the first ripple with a new idea, but they are the ones who bring everybody along in the tide, and again, it has to do with empowerment.
It was usual for principals in this study to suggest that their trust and respect of their staff was a motivating and empowering influence for the teachers. “Utilizing my position to share the ideas of our teams as well as the process we use makes a difference because my staff feels so empowered when I value, respect, and share their ideas, opinions, and decisions.” One principal shared,

I create opportunities for my teachers to feel successful and just let them know how much I appreciate their work and I try not to yank the rug out from under them when things aren’t going exactly as I would like. I just try to give them more tools for their toolbox, but don’t destroy what they are comfortable with doing. One principal stated that teachers are empowered and expectations are raised when the principal uses the successes of his/her staff and builds on those successes. “You build on their success. I honor them as professionals. I think when we start prescribing and telling, that we have lowered our standard for the profession of teaching because we’re not allowing them to be a thinker.” She stated her conclusion in this way:

It’s so powerful when they see a different way; they try it in their classrooms and then come back and have that dialogue. Once it hits them that something is working, it’s so powerful because they gain confidence in learning a different way of doing things and they learned because you empowered them to be learners.

Another principal noted that she empowers her staff by structuring questions in a way that builds a positive environment for collaboration.

We structure our questions in the team meeting to force them to go to the positive.

We would say, in the strategy you did do what was one area of growth, what was one area you could improve on, but give me three things that went well, or, in this
past week, name one student you touched that, you know, meant something to you. But every team meeting, there was a question that forced them to the positive. And when you do that thirty times throughout the year, you really do change the way you think. They begin to say, you know, I’m not a bad teacher. I think the greatest empowerment I gave my teachers was to force the conversation to go to the positive…and I learned that after ten years as a principal.

Many principals felt that leadership capacity would not improve if teachers did not get empowerment from the principal to go forth and improve their own learning. One principal stated,

It’s not me as a principal, going in—my evaluation and having to tell them what to do, but they are noticing and they are becoming a learner and building their own capacity, and that’s what’s empowering as they sustain their learning and then move to a higher level, which is where ultimately we want to go with teacher collaboration.

Yet another principal uniquely mentioned that the teachers in his building were empowered by learning how to shift much of the hard work from themselves to the students. This empowerment was a strategy that left his staff more ready and willing to work with one another as they had more energy and enthusiasm as the kids did more of the work.

We empowered our teachers to transfer much of the work from teacher-led to student-generated. We provided a district-wide professional development initiative called gradual release of responsibilities, which is based on letting it transfer from teacher-led work to student-generated work in the
classroom…teachers facilitating rather than being the workers—students become the workers—rather than just regurgitate, and so teachers are empowered to make the students work which gives them more opportunity to have the time and energy to collaborate with colleagues. I think our teachers like this strategy.

Many principals in this study contributed support to the concept that empowering a teaching staff eager to improve led to a more collaborative culture. They agreed a collaborative culture where teachers felt empowered to improve their own leadership capacity through shared knowledge was important.

**Strategy 6: Build a culture of continuous improvement.** Principals suggested that teacher collaboration must become embedded in a culture that believes in continuous improvement. One principal declared, “In this culture of continuous improvement adults have to ask what they need to know, what is the new learning, how will I use it, and how am I accountable for it?” He further asserted, “Not only do we want our existing staff to believe in this type of culture, but we want new staff members to be willing and able to adapt to this culture.” He concluded by mentioning how the concept of continuous improvement is connected to hiring new teachers.

When we interview, we talk about our culture of continuous improvement. We ask how the perspective teacher will work with others, will you share with others, can you benefit by collaborating, and so on. We let them know we focus on continuous improvement and we have a model of teacher collaboration.

Other principals noted that negativity, cynicism, sarcasm, and bad attitudes would not prevail in a culture of continuous improvement. One principal commented that “in this culture . . . our best principals don’t accept negativity. And they’ve had conversations,
either one-on-one, pull the teacher aside, walk the teacher out of the team meeting and say, I’m sorry, but this kind of behavior is not acceptable.” She continued to share, “Negative emails have been shut down and said, this is not acceptable behavior.” This principal further asserted,

Teaching the protocol and etiquette of successful teacher collaboration and making teachers accountable for stepping up and acting like professionals in an adult setting, instead of just letting those negative adult behaviors take over, is a big part of building a culture of continuous improvement.

One principal shared that a culture of continuous improvement will use research based best practices with adults just as with kids. She shared,

To continuously improve, we have to differentiate the learning for our adults just like we do for students. The strength of our instructional delivery will increase as we meet the needs of each adult learner. So, in a way we have to be more alike in order to be more different, if that makes sense . . .

She believed that “the only way we can keep improving is for each teacher to have all the training and information that he or she needs on an individual basis and the collaboration to keep each staff member informed,” concluding that “this has to be a continuous cycle that keeps repeating itself.”

Another principal noted that a culture of continuous improvement will “keep them (teachers) growing as well.” A principal described a culture of continuous improvement with the following statement: “That continuous improvement culture drives a lot. You ask who’s not learning. Why? What are we going to do about it? Staying with this idea and the collaborative culture to answer the questions has made a big difference for us.”
Principals undoubtedly held to the belief that developing a culture of continuous improvement to enhance collaboration should be embedded strategically within secondary schools for the purpose of student and teacher growth.

**Strategy 7: Teacher retention.** Principals agreed that retaining the best teachers is an important strategy. If a principal loses good teachers, it is possible the new teacher will not be as effective in teacher collaboration as the exiting teacher will. One principal shared, “Teacher retention has been a big strategy for me to help build a collaborative culture in our school. We’ve kept influential teachers, kept them growing, and we created more time for them.” He mentioned, “I continually recognize what a teacher does well, praise teachers publicly, and reward their collaboration because I want to keep my best teachers.”

Another principal described teacher retention as simply keeping good people. He declared, “I mean keeping the right people is the most important thing we do. Hire the right people, and keep them.” Teacher retention, as a strategy, was recognized due to the difficulty of training new people and the consistency needed to develop a culture over time.

**Strategy 8: Embed teacher collaboration in the school day.** The strategy of embedded teacher collaboration during the school day continued to surface in each focus group among participating principals. Many principals commented on the importance of embedding the work in the school day. The principals in this study had many positive comments about embedded collaboration. “One of the most positive things we did, in terms of strategy, was work the collaborative time into the school day,” asserted one principal. He also stated,
Since we weren’t requesting anything above and beyond the regular day, we didn’t have to come up with money to compensate them for their extra time. I can see where they didn’t mind wanting to be involved with something since they felt it did not come out of their designated school time and they didn’t have to meet outside of school hours.

Many principals connected finding the embedded time with the work of the master schedule. One principal insisted, “Master scheduling is key. If you build the work into your regular school day in a stress free, non-threatening environment, you can get through the implementation dip of teacher collaboration and they gain trust in you as an administrator.”

In addition, principals talked of creativity in scheduling to find embedded time to collaborate. He stated, “Be creative with time. You have to carve out the time to collaborate. Time is always a major factor when seeking strategies to promote a collaborative culture.” He added, “We sometimes use faculty meetings to do instructional work and it is teacher led. We do plan periods occasionally. Anything to keep the work embedded in the day.” This principal related the importance of using time wisely. “Anything that is purely informational related to schedule or announcements, I try to do that by e-mail. Every faculty meeting that we have should result in adult learning that impacts student learning.”

The principals who participated in this study named several strategies they have used to encourage teacher collaboration. Among these strategies, principals identified for successful teacher collaboration included setting norms for teacher collaboration, providing support to teachers through human and material resources, and distributing
leadership among administrators and teacher leaders. In addition, empowerment of teachers to grow and become collaborative as adult learners, developing a culture of continuous improvement, retaining the best teachers, and finally and possibly most importantly, embedding the work in the school day to protect teachers time were mentioned as effective strategies. Within these strategies, the principals described in more detail how they put the strategies into use. Although optimal levels of teacher collaboration are not occurring at all the secondary schools, the principals indicated they have met with considerable success in moving toward their goal of a successful collaborative environment.

**Research Subquestion 7: What Training And Professional Development Did Secondary Principals Use To Improve The Process?**

Principals used focus group questions four, nine, 10, and 13 to help answer this research question. Secondary school principals agreed that teacher collaboration was not as widespread in their school as they would like because each wanted a very collaborative culture. When asked what training or support would support them in developing teacher collaboration in their schools, principals suggested several answers. Many of their answers supported and reinforced what research literature has indicated. The answers to this question are described within this section of the study.

Programs, training, and services that emphasize teacher collaboration are unique in that they focus attention on the behaviors and attitudes of the adults involved in instructing students. For that reason, they may be viewed by some teachers as threatening, according to certain principals in the focus groups. One principal stated, “It is particularly important, then, that the steps for planning training and professional
development for principals to use in supporting teacher collaboration be implemented systematically.” She assessed her statement by asserting that planning and development “enables all involved to feel ownership in the collaborative program and provides opportunities for them to become accustomed to the demands of collaborative programs and services.” Friend and Cook (1992) have suggested the program planning steps that are essential are determining the goals and structures plan and prepare for implementation, implement, and then maintain the program after implementation. Principals in the study agreed with research from the literature review that training and professional development must be sustained in order to achieve success in teacher collaboration.

Barth (2001) indicates that administrators need to model desirable traits, foster those traits, and encourage the behaviors in others. They must provide incentives for teachers to participate in the professional development and they must arrange for substitute teachers so that the participants can be released for planning activities or professional development. As one principal acknowledged, “Principals must model attendance and encourage attendance for participants to attend professional meetings.” Principals in Northwest Arkansas indicated agreement with the research in their responses. Question seven describes the training and professional development secondary principals use to improve their success in teacher collaboration.

**Training 1: Master schedule training.** The major discussion among participating principals tended to be about the master schedule. They all were interested in learning how to change the master schedule and build changes within the school day.
One principal commented concerning the frustration of finding collaborative time in a tight master schedule.

I cannot even name you a school in the area that has all common planning periods because the structure will not allow it. If anything, you have to go with kind of what you’ve had in the past and look and see how you tweak it (the schedule) going into next spring, then you can make changes. We deal with the master schedule every single day. And now there are aspects of the master schedule that cannot be changed. The system does not allow it.

Others saw the problem with changing a master schedule, but felt it could be done. For example, one stated,

We have to overhaul our master scheduling and staffing procedures to find room in the staff to have instructional coaches. We have to prioritize. If everything is a priority, nothing is a priority. So we have to filter and protect some things and minimize those so that the focus can be instruction and instructional leadership.

Her conclusion of master scheduling was, “We’ve had to schedule better. We’ve had to take some stuff off.”

**Training 2: Principal training in building trust and improving relationships.**

Principals continually spoke of building trust and feeling pressure to improve relationships among staff members.

In moving to a campus that I think is eager for leadership and direction, I have got to build their trust. I have got to convince that it is not business as usual. It’s a new day and I have to provide for them an understanding and provide something in this area of trust.
Similarly, another principal echoed the need to build trust in order to improve the opportunity for collaboration.

I first have to get teachers where they trust me that it is going to be different as we move to a more collaborative environment and that I am there to support them, I’m going to be active and I’m going to be involved. My biggest barrier right now is going to be that they trust me. So that’s the training and professional development I’m looking at now—something to bring us closer together and trusting each other.

One principal commented on the importance of working on trust everyday and not ignoring distrust or dissension if trust was to become a part of the culture. Quoting an authority on the role of the principal, one participant stated, “Todd Whitaker says, if you know something and you don’t address it, then you’re saying it’s okay. And I think if we continue to do that, we’re lowering our standards for ourselves and our school, and that’s not acceptable.” She continued by adding, “And so I think you’re creating a culture where it’s okay to have a difference of opinion, but a positive way to handle that and not be negative or pull the whole school down, and do what’s best for the kids.” She suggested, “Embedded training on building those trusting relationships would be excellent to help with this.”

Another principal spoke of the necessity to confront those issues that hamper trust. She also quoted an expert:

Susan Scott refers to hard conversations or what she terms fierce conversations.

She said, we win, we succeed, we fail, one conversation at a time. Sometimes it’s
Training 3: High expectations for all. The principals continued to lament the lack of high expectations in many teachers:

It’s just frustrating that you don’t have a hundred percent willing to collaborate, you know, and you have to have some type of training to bring everyone along. We just can’t allow the status quo and we have to realize there is always more to do and the expectation is that we can always improve. We need to teach people that you need to be that cheerleader, that encourager, that person that doesn’t give up.

One principal commented about not allowing negativity to take over in their school.

And I think one of the things we overcame was the negativity and things being said that were negative. You need training and support as you talk with those people and tell them that the expectation is to be positive and have high expectations for others and ourselves. It takes real training and professional development to create team players, but the benefits are unlimited.

A veteran principal understood how important the training in high expectations was by relating that he had not had that experience.

What I would have given as a new teacher to have had training on working as a team and just sitting with my peers to collaborate on the work, or having someone to mentor me, a group of teachers to hold my hand, whatever you want to call it,—it would have been wonderful. The expectations of your peers are a powerful influence.
Several principals chimed in with their agreement.

**Training 4: Professional development from a national network.** Principals in the study suggested that training support and professional development from a national network is essential if local educators are to learn the best practices, including teacher collaboration. Several principals in this investigation also agreed that learning from their peers across the nation was beneficial. One principal stated,

Something we got from the model schools conference and network of schools involved with that effort was the relationship piece, and that’s something that would affect every teacher, no matter what subject they taught, but helping teachers recognize that they don’t teach subjects, but that they teach children or people.

Another principal felt the national network to be so important that he referred to it as an underlying common need for all educators. His position statement was,

I think that network connection from a national perspective is an underlying common thread that we have to establish in education, and until we do, it’s really hard to overcome all the obstacles and barriers that we face in education. We need that collegial support to sustain the collaborative effort.

One principal simply stated, “Hooking up with a professional network of colleagues was a real positive for us.”

**Training 5: Better higher education training for new teachers.** Higher education needs to prepare teachers for collaborative work, yet many principals felt there was a void in that training:
I think training needs and professional development goes back further into educational foundation courses. It’s kinda like what kind of disposition and preparedness do people bring to an interview for a job? If they (teachers) don’t already have some collaborative skills and relationship skills in terms of loving their children when they get to you, then it’s really hard to teach that.

**Training 6: Professional learning communities training.** Teacher collaboration is a major component of professional learning communities. Several principals felt like the two could not be separated and insisted that professional learning communities training would be essential in building a collaborative culture: “We’re working on a professional learning community, to encourage more as far as work from that angle, to just the professional development part, for our staff to really know what it means to be in a professional learning community.” Another principal stated, “We’re spending about a week and a half in our professional development time before school starts to come back and revisit professional learning communities. So we’re going to do some professional development, some training going forward.”

**Training 7: Training to be more reflective.** Principals acknowledged they had come to understand that collaborative work required a reflective approach to the work they were doing. Although participants did not mention a specific training to meet that need, nonetheless, they insisted it had to be a part of the training in our secondary schools. For example, one principal stated, “We’re taking more of a reflective look with our work, what now? I mean, we’ve reached a level of collaboration. I don’t think we’ve plateaued. I think our work every year has gotten better.” He validated his thinking by
stating, “We know that because of student data—but what now? What’s next for us?” He continued his thoughts on becoming more reflective by adding,

And that has to come from every participant in the building in terms of adults that work together on a daily basis. And I’m going to let them give me input individually, some collaboration through departments as well. What’s next for them? What do they see?

His final thoughts were shared with the statement, “I think you constantly have to embed the training and professional development in a formal way that allows this type of reflective questioning for the purpose of quality improvement.”

Training 8: Embedded professional development. Embedded professional development that is research based, applied daily, and provided by the school organization on an on-going basis was a priority to all the principals in the focus group interviews:

Educational initiatives come and go. I think the changes that need to happen to enable us to overcome barriers are changes that haven’t even been thought of yet, but I think the organization must supply regular research based support in the form applied professional development by our own people, professional magazines, periodicals, and other ideas that keep us informed daily of what has evolved in the area of collaborative work.

Several principals felt overwhelmed with having to accept late hires because of a district efficiency model that required full classrooms before new teachers were hired. Teachers often were not hired until late summer and sometimes not until school had started, which meant that the best teachers were not available. These principals felt an
embedded training in teacher collaboration would convince district level employees that instruction might improve if the emphasis could be turned to working collaboratively as opposed to being efficient with full classrooms.

We need training in how to relax the efficiency because efficiency is a higher priority than teacher collaboration and that affects the quality of the staff hired which in turn affects the quality of teacher collaboration. The best people are hired in the spring and when we can’t hire until late July or even August, we don’t get the best people which affects the collaborative culture you are trying to build and we feel like we have to rush and get them ready and we’ve got to do it now, so that takes away from collaborative time in our preparation. This would actually be professional development based on research about what is more important—efficiency or successful teacher collaboration that affects student achievement? Principals like embedded professional development because it is point in time learning that can be applied immediately and it saves money by not traveling to expensive destinations:

By having the team meetings in the school day, it encourages professional development and professional learning and conversations begin to change, and again, the whole climate, because if teachers are learning, you hope that students are learning, you know, because they’re learning new techniques, they’re sharing it with their students, and the best part is it is embedded in the day and we aren’t going of on a long, expensive trip to get the training.

Data from the interviews suggested that principals also like embedded training because it provides focus on a specific need.
Doing a school wide focus on improving literacy, thinking skills, critical thinking skills, better questioning in the classroom, where every teacher is focusing kids to read, think why, and discuss critically raises everything. This is how the training becomes embedded in the daily work and is on going and applied on a daily basis as well. With regular, embedded professional development, teachers totally overhaul how they view themselves as teachers. They become lifelong learners. They become more reflective. They are automatically reflecting and evaluating their lessons for improvement. That’s the biggest piece for me.

One principal gave an emotional anecdote concerning the success of embedded collaborative work: “Here is a result of embedded work. I had a student write a letter back to a teacher and the letter said, well, you tricked me. You turned me into a lifelong reader.” The principal concluded her thoughts by adding, “And that teacher said she should have written a letter to me (the principal), she should have written her letter to several of us, and, it would have said,” he concluded, “I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to do this level of work with this kid.”

Other principals suggested a variety of topics that could be covered during embedded professional development. “Our embedded professional development should contain training on parental involvement, quality instruction, and interventions for at-risk students.” Another principal suggested, “instead of sending the whole world to professional training outside the district, we need to save that expense and refrain from putting so many subs in front of our kids . . . . to become the one who gives the training.”

Yet another principal asserted, “To do embedded work, principals must realize that it will take more trainers within the school system, but are they willing to move that
direction?’ She acknowledged, “Elementary schools are ahead of secondary schools in building a collaborative culture. We have to train more curriculum coaches in secondary schools to get to the same level of support elementary schools have.” She emphasized her point by adding, “I mean there’s some elementary schools where the curriculum coaches are in a classroom for an entire six to nine weeks continually giving feedback. It’s not gonna happen with two coaches and ninety teachers at the secondary level.” She concluded her thoughts with, “So we have to re-think how we can build our own leadership capacity and do that at the secondary level to get the depth of collaboration that the elementary schools have.” Her final thought was, “We could do the training in-house, but money is an issue.”

Other principals agreed with this principal’s viewpoint. They agree embedded work is the best way to build the collaborative culture, but they also see the difficulty in reaching this goal. One principal in agreement stated,

We have to increase leadership capacity for all and do it in-house. I would suggest to you that all teachers lead every single day and facilitate a learning environment for students, and so if they don’t build those leadership skills, every single one of them, to become better at their work—you know, in the ideal world, you would be able to have different people rotate around and be able to facilitate and help with that, and we’re not there yet, but I think we’re going to have to help keep empowering and building that capacity in all of our teaching staff within the confines of the school day.

Many of the principals in this investigation indicated they desired more teacher leaders to facilitate collaboration but wanted to avoid the blurring between administrative
evaluator and coach. Indeed, one principal shared, “I think it’s great our curriculum coaches are getting all this training and they come back and share; however, maybe having a teacher go with the coaches for the in-house training will build more leadership capacity.” One principal summed the group thinking up nicely:

And I think it’s really tough work to add this work during our school day, but building capacity and helping all teachers see themselves in a different way, as professionals, is essential. And, also, they must all be viewed as leaders in the classroom to guarantee the respect deserved by teachers who are willing to move from acting as isolated workers to collaborative teachers.

According to the data from this investigation, collaboration can be an exciting vehicle through which teachers can plan and carry out an array of services for students. The principals in this study identified categories of training and professional development they thought would be helpful to them. The principals felt the trainings should include training in master scheduling, training in building trust and improving relationships among staff, training in high expectations for all as a non-negotiable and training support as well as professional development from a national network. Trainings should also include higher education training for teachers that prepares teachers for collaborative work, Professional Learning Communities training, training to be more reflective in our work, and training and professional development that is embedded in the school day, research based, applied daily, and provided by the school organization.

The trainings and professional development described would support principals’ efforts to overcome barriers to teacher collaboration and help them address their schools’ needs for improving teacher collaboration. According to the data obtained in this study,
establishing a strong collaborative ethic in a school has the additional benefit of enhancing teacher morale and providing teachers with a support network, but it can’t happen without professional development and on-going, applied, job-embedded training.

According to the principals in this study, fostering collaboration requires patience and careful attention to details in the training process, but by managing the professional development carefully, administrators can ensure that collaboration becomes a foundation for their school community.

Research Subquestion 8: What Were The Outcomes From The Process For School Personnel And Students?

The principals in this study identified several outcomes of teacher collaboration in their schools. These outcomes were not obtained without a cost of time and money. Undoubtedly, the costs of collaboration are significant consideration for educators.

When considering the possibilities that teacher collaboration provides for professionals to form productive working partnerships, it is tempting to see collaboration as a panacea for a broad array of educational issues. Conversely, if administrators begin calculating the costs of collaboration in terms of staff time, they may decide it is not worth the effort before even piloting a collaborative effort. If collaboration only had positive outcomes, everyone would be participating in collaborative efforts and this is not occurring universally. The Northwest Arkansas principals all agreed that beginning the collaborative effort in their schools was worth the effort and resulted in many positive outcomes, even when collaboration was implemented on a somewhat limited scale.

Perhaps one of the most promising outcomes of teacher collaboration is the increased opportunity it gives teachers to interact with one another regarding instructional
issues (Marzano et al., 2005). Specifically, teachers who collaborate are more likely to
discuss with their colleagues areas of the curriculum they have difficulty teaching. They
are also likely to obtain ideas and feedback from their peers to help solve instructional
dilemmas. As a result, teachers learn skills from one another that they can use in their
classes. As more school staff members, including administrators, participate in
collaborative efforts, a ripple effect of positive outcomes such as shared knowledge and
improved skills spread through the school. Improved instruction and increased student
achievement are the ultimate outcomes that the Northwest Arkansas principals agreed
were most important to them. Question 8 describes the outcomes achieved from the
process of teacher collaboration.

**Outcome 1: Job satisfaction and teacher retention.** Principals’ cited job
satisfaction that leads to teacher retention as a major outcome of teacher collaboration.

“Life is about the relationships you build with other people and how you touch other
people’s lives, not what the test scores say, and this teacher collaboration, I think, builds
those types of relationships, and that’s a good thing.” One principal equated job
satisfaction with teachers having good attitudes:

Attitudes of our adults are much more positive since we have begun the teacher
collaboration initiative. They are so much more confident in their abilities, so
willing to share, and look forward to our weekly meetings. Our teachers seem to
be much more optimistic because they’ve been able to experience and see the
results of working together for the good of the students.

One principal specifically described the outcome of job satisfaction.
When I had the fifteen minute conferences with the teachers at the end of the year and asked, what was the best thing about this year? I had sixty percent or more of my teachers state that the collaborative work gave them clear expectations, why they had those expectations and why they had to be accountable for those expectations. I think, I as principal, by providing the vision, clear expectations, they feel like it’s done well, they get feedback on their work, then it gives them job satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment, and a sense of connectedness to something bigger than themselves. They want to stay and build on that.

Principals often related increased job satisfaction for themselves as they became more collaborative in the workplace. They want to stay in their jobs just as the teachers do. One principal stated,

My own job satisfaction has increased—the work I do. The work we do is very daunting. It’s consuming, and it would be easy to burn out or to give up or walk into a district, initiate a few changes for a couple of years, and move on, and start over again somewhere else with a fresh slate.

This principal shared, “And personally, I feel commitment. I do not want to leave what I got started. I want to be there for the payoff, and I feel supported, and appreciate the relationship I have with my colleagues.” He concluded, “And it’s due to the collaborative environment.”

Responses from principals reinforced the notion that job satisfaction among the teaching staff and administrative staff is something students notice. As they see teachers working together and staying together on the job, students become supportive of the teachers.
I see my teachers working together and it rubs off on the students. They seem more willing to support teacher efforts when the teachers seem happy on their jobs. When we do surveys for students to ask them what are some practices that you would like to see in a teacher in the classroom, I am so impressed and encouraged that the students are willing to fill them out like they do. You know we’re here for the students and when they see us so fulfilled, they understand why we ask them to change or help us with something, and they don’t mind collaborating with us—because they witness us doing it with each other on a daily basis.

One principal described the fulfillment and growth of a staff member in euphoric terms:

I have seen it here and elsewhere, people you would have never imagined that got on board, and focused on kids and focused on learning. You wouldn’t have predicted that just a few years ago. It has transformed them. It really changed what some of the teachers are doing in their instruction and they seem so much more fulfilled and happy in their jobs.

Job satisfaction and job retention produce teachers with passion for helping kids and becoming better learners themselves, according to another principal:

Teachers are more student centered, more instructionally centered, and more learning centered for both the students and themselves. Teacher collaboration seems to inspire this type of renewal in many folks. They end up wanting to stay at their school and build on that culture.
According to two principals from the same district, job satisfaction and retention of teachers may be manifested in terms of school spirit. They spoke of increased school spirit and school pride as results of teacher collaboration:

Our school spirit has even improved which is a whole different ball game . . . the teachers, now they’re working more together. You have a little more pride, that school pride, that work pride, and that trickles down to the kids.

The other principal stated,

Our school spirit has come 10-fold in the last three years, based on the fact that I think people want to be back at work. You know, the teachers are feeling better about that, and the students are getting a better quality teacher. The kids are taking more pride in their work.

The intrinsic value of trust was mentioned as a manifestation of job satisfaction by a principal. This principal felt that trust had deepened among his staff and as trust developed the overall character of the staff improved. The character improvement was manifested by more unselfishness of his staff. He equated job satisfaction and teacher retention with the improvement of intrinsic values of trust and character.

Anytime you establish ownership in something, including teacher collaboration, then it’s going to improve the quality of the effort and the outcome. We have built strength and confidence and our character has improved as well and we now take more personal responsibility for delivering excellence. This has been an outcome of our collaboration. Teacher collaboration in our school has built trust and support among the faculty as they got together and shared ideas. They trust each other not to hold back to make just me better, but to open up and make each other
better. That trust really builds a family relationship and establishes an atmosphere of selflessness.

Another principal repeated and supported the previous principal with this statement. “Teacher collaboration adds value internally as we develop trust in each other. We want to continue to work together.” Data from the focus groups revealed that in the experiences of the participants, teacher collaboration produced outcomes of job satisfaction and teacher retention.

**Outcome 2: Teachers leave.** Remarks from principals suggested that, oddly enough, the opposite effect of job satisfaction and teacher retention sometimes occurs when teacher collaboration becomes more embedded in the school. “I’ve had a large change in personnel. I mean, since I’ve been principal, it was either,—I mean, I hate to say this, but it was get on board or get off the train, you know.” This principal did not think the teacher’s leaving was a personal thing. “And it wasn’t because I did anything to them. It’s—you know, they moved on with their lives and the people that I hired in to take their positions . . . I know how I wanted them to work with the other staff.” He concluded by stating, “So you know, through all of the change of personnel, all of that has become better education for the students and, you know, more success in the classroom.” Another principal very pointedly stated that sometimes teachers just want to leave as they are expected to work with other teachers: “An outcome has been some departures or ejections of teachers as the expectations for them to work together was ratcheted up.”
It was not unanimous in the focus group, but several echoed the concept that teachers sometimes feel uncomfortable leaving the isolation of their classrooms and choose to leave when the expectation of collaborative work does not go away.

We’ve seen that same type thing—the teachers leaving because of the expectations of collaboration. There’s a saying that our superintendent uses, Water finds its—sinks to its own level. And every year it has changed a little bit and it’s kinda like, I don’t know who’s gonna work where.

**Outcome 3: Increased creativity of teachers.** As teachers become more integrated in the collaborative work and gain new energy and job satisfaction, they often become more creative: “Teachers get a spark from collaborative meetings, and they go off in new, positive directions after they learn new skills from others.” He continued, “Collaboration has the power to completely change people and their whole way of thinking and acting around students and colleagues.”

The continued conversation about creativity described how students could become the beneficiaries of the change in teachers:

The newfound creativity and energy gained from collaboration may also spark a kid and they may be motivated with new desire to succeed and that may happen just because we get together and bounce ideas off each other. I call it the ricochet effect, you know, where it’s not intended but it’s a pleasant outcome.

As teachers become more creative, the classes and programs they direct become more desirable and students want to be a part of that. “We’re seeing increases in all our programs as teachers become more creative in their approach to students and as they learn more about students from other teachers they are collaborating with.” One principal
noted that the increased creativity gained from collaborating with other teachers produced an increase in extracurricular activities for those sponsors:

This includes our academic and extra-curricular programs. The whole idea of collaborating and working together is embedded in our school culture and this harmony was created at some point after we started the collaborative effort in our school. A whole new team concept has started at our school based on the spirit of collaboration which really did take creativity on the part of our teachers.

Another principal concluded this question by stating, “We don’t have it all figured out, but we are a better team than we were before the collaboration started taking place.”

**Outcome 4: The quality of instruction is better.** Because there is more knowledge and skill in a collective group than there is in one individual teacher, instruction gets better when teachers share their expertise.

The quality of instruction has improved across the board from the strongest teacher to the weakest teacher. Because the quality of teaching is better, it requires students to think, and articulate at a deeper level about the content, and I believe the quality of education for the student is better.

Another principal added, “The quality of teaching improves because we all have the same focus, same vision, going on the same path—and that would never happen without collaborative time.”

As instruction is improved and kids become more interested in their learning, attitudes improve, and the collaborative structure spawns more effort to collaborate if different ways. Teachers want more and more because they can see there is a difference in their students. “The quality of teaching is improved because they hear more positive
things and that what they are doing is making a difference in the lives of kids.”

Furthermore, “We recognize that and celebrate that--which moves us forward to even more learning and deeper learning.” Another principal adds to the concept that the quality of instruction is improved by adding:

And learning is addictive. Once you start learning a little bit, then you want more and more because you want to get better. And that can’t help but raise our student achievement goal, and not just for the high stakes kids but really believe we are here for all kids to be successful in their life. That’s the important thing.

One principal spoke of improved instructional alignment, which led to improved instruction in his staff because of teacher collaboration, “The total instructional alignment we gained from the collaborative time improved our instruction, helped us discuss test data, and eventually improved our test scores which got us out of school improvement.”

In the data retrieved from this investigation, a decline in the quality of instruction while working collaboratively was never mentioned.

**Outcome 5: Students and teachers become lifelong learners.** As teachers become collaborative, they find themselves learning new skills, particularly in technology. The collaboration continually puts new learning in front of the teachers and they begin to see the need for lifelong learning and sharing that with their students, according to one principal:

When teachers collaborate and model what they want for students, students learn a lifelong skill. I look at it throughout their life, and if they’re a lifelong learner, they’ve learned to learn. In this technological world we live in, there’s so much information. They know what to look for, how to analyze that, and make
decisions, and ultimately, that’s going to make our education system stronger because those will be the parents out there, and they’re lifelong learners, and it will be the catalyst to help our whole society. So it gets really big. It can be huge, and that is what is so exciting about it (the collaborative effort).

According to another principal, as teachers model the academic strategies they want from students, students notice those strategies that will be with them for a lifetime.

At my last high school, the students were also educated as to what the school vision was, that it was about student engagement, and we gave the students booklets of what we were expecting, which included inducing curiosity, expand, et cetera, so, you know, it was all about the students and the creation of lifelong learning behaviors. We had academic assemblies where we talked about giving our best and we wanted to score with the best of the best in the state, and the teachers are really working hard because they’re learning and the students would know that.

The same principal gave an example of the students reminding her that lifelong skills were important to them as students, and when teachers did not teach as expected, the students noticed:

An example of lifelong learning skills being taught in my school was when I had hired a new teacher, who probably was a whole lot more lecture-based than what the rest of the teachers were, and I had a group of seniors come in and say to me, Ms. Teacher is not inducing our curiosity or having us expand. She is not engaging us. We’re not able to think in there. And so ultimately here, that’s what I
want students to be able to do. They recognize when they are thinking. They recognize when they are working. They become lifelong learners themselves.

**Outcome 6: Increased student achievement.** One principal that participated in the interview process had been a principal at three secondary schools where she implemented teacher collaboration, and at each school, she had seen an increase in student achievement:

I’ve done this at three schools, two high schools and a junior high, and between two and four year periods at each school, and even my first year at the high school; student achievement never decreased, it went up considerably. So in my last high school that I was at for four years, ACT scores went from an average of eighteen to twenty-one. Math, algebra, geometry scores started out at three and six percent proficient; four years later, we’re fifty-three and fifty-seven percent proficient-advanced. Literacy went from sixteen percent proficient to fifty-four percent proficient-advanced. So even on national tests, like ACT, to state that student test scores have gone up validates a positive outcome of teacher collaboration. In my first year at my recent high school, we got a ten percent gain on the literacy exam.

Another principal spoke of steady improvement, but did not give specifics. This principal felt teacher collaboration had helped get past just doing test prep to get test scores up on a one time basis. “You know, we’re going to have some fluctuation, but over time, it has been a steady increase in student achievement. And the neat thing is that it just increases without doing just a focused test prep thing.”
While admitting that improved test scores had occurred and were important, another principal insisted that helping kids become successful in life was more important than a test score. This same principal related teacher collaboration to being like having a family at school to support the students. “Teacher collaboration is like having your family at school. It just can’t help but improve student achievement on state tests, but, more than that, make our kids successful for their life, which is the real test.” His conclusion was “that’s the most important thing. So it’s very exciting. I mean, whether its test scores or behavior, you know if you work together, you seem to benefit and the students definitely benefit.”

Yet another principal that had worked in a ninth grade academy spoke of how the collaborative effort helped multiple teachers support one individual student. The academic improvement of that one student was so very important to the principal:

We’ve seen improved success in the classroom with student behavior. Or teachers being able to collaborate and help each other know how to deal with a difficult student resulted in the student’s academic success. Even though there was a residual effect with discipline as we collaborated, we were really measuring academic success.

A veteran high school principal summed up the feelings of the group by indicating that the success of one student made him realize exactly why he chose to enter education as a profession:

And the very student that you knew—you know, you just had this gut feeling that this student may not make it, no matter what we do, and then lo and behold, they
do—they make it, and, you know, you just say, Gosh, this is why I went into this business.

Teacher collaboration will improve student success, but one principal was careful to point out that it could take time: “I see more positive outcomes with the children as far as their academics. But it’s a three to five year process and to work through teacher and parent problems to get student success is well worth the collaborative effort.” One principal testified that her school had worked its way out of school improvement as teachers worked together:

Through our collaborative process, at one point we did have a school that was in year two of school improvement, and they are no longer in improvement (because test scores went up), so we’re doing something right. We’re getting some positive out of that. We have the student achievement data to prove it.

**Outcome 7: Teacher collaboration is the emerging hope for the future of secondary education.** A veteran principal in the focus group interview boldly spoke of the importance of teacher collaboration in secondary education:

And I think we’re headed to a point right now where collaboration is going to be one of the key things. It may very well be the nucleus as to what’s going to hold this system together, because there’s getting ready to be so many changes from a technology standpoint of the way we deliver instruction, that if—you know, if you don’t have teachers working together and talking and sharing, it’s going to be very, very frustrating—very frustrating.

Principals were quick to agree that the future success of secondary education could very well depend on whether secondary educators could become experts and daily
practitioners of the collaborative effort. “I think you just hit a key to it right there, that it
will be the nucleus. It will be the nucleus of—teacher collaboration will be the nucleus of
a successful secondary school.”

One principal demonstrated futuristic thinking by acknowledging the only way
teachers will be able to keep up with advances would be through the collaborative work
of secondary teachers:

You know, we’re having conversations about at what point in time our students
will not even have textbooks, and it’s not far away. Well, you know, for some
teachers, they can’t operate without a textbook. But now, will they have a
textbook? Yes. But it will be in a different medium and it will be multiple
sources, and it will require collaboration to work through that change.

This statement of a participating principal summarized the feelings of one group
of focus group participants. “There is much uneasiness and an awareness that change is a
certainty for all of us and teacher collaboration may be the thing that can keep us all
together moving forward.” According to another principal, “A major outcome of the
collaborative work is that the future success of secondary education will depend on more
collaborative work.” Yet another principal acknowledged, “There is an awareness among
principals that the future of secondary education may depend on teacher collaboration.”

The principals in this study identified seven major outcomes from the teacher
collaboration process for school personnel and students. Outcomes identified were:
teacher retention and job satisfaction increases, teachers sometimes leave, increased
creativity of teachers occurs, the quality of instruction is better, students become lifelong
learners, increased student achievement is commonplace, and teacher collaboration as the
emerging hope for the future of secondary education becomes a perceived absolute by the practicing principals in Northwest Arkansas that participated in the study. These outcomes, principals indicated, make it essential to continue to provide the conditions to support collaboration fully. Naming the outcomes is a definitive and strong foundation of support to confront and overcome barriers to future efforts of teacher collaboration.

**Summary**

The data in this chapter reflect a sampling of thought among principals in Northwest Arkansas, as they considered the possibilities (or the realities) of collaboration in the schools in which they practiced. The data were collected through a multi-case investigation to form a descriptive and conceptual representation of principals’ perceptions of collaboration.

The principals who participated in this study, having been given both the conceptual and operational teacher collaboration before the focus group interviews, were in agreement that developing successful teacher collaboration in their secondary schools was an important goal to be considered. The principals described their experiences, observations, and behaviors at their own schools from their own perspectives. Principals found common successes and disappointments in their efforts to support teacher collaboration as the descriptions of what they faced on a daily basis developed into recurring patterns.

The principals identified several factors that affect the quantity, effectiveness, and/or success of teacher collaboration in their schools. They also identified how the process unfolded in their schools, what the major events in the process were, and what role they played. Principals additionally identified important dimensions of teacher
collaboration and how participants or non-participants were changed by the as they encountered those dimensions. They further identified barriers to teacher collaboration and those underlying reasons for the barriers. Finally, principals identified the benefits and outcomes of successful teacher collaboration and what strategies and/or professional development would support building a more collaborative culture in their secondary schools.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In the previous chapter, principals shared their perceptions of collaboration in the schools within their respective districts. The qualitative multi-case approach allowed a structured analysis of the data to inform the investigation. Using this qualitative research model, this chapter further explores the complex nature of teacher collaboration with school cultures as it spans the distance between the data and discussion of the findings.

This investigation rests upon a theoretical and research-based foundation. This foundation includes the concept that to improve teaching and student achievement, it is desirable for secondary schools to become professional learning communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Schmoker, 2006). It is also theorized that teacher collaboration is the central component of a professional learning community (Barth, 2001; DuFour, 2004). Another research-based foundation is that within professional learning communities, teacher collaboration provides job-embedded, continuous, and applied student-based teacher learning (Hord, 1997; Little, 1990; Schmoker). Research also indicates that job embedded collaboration is preferable to external professional development alone for better context-driven and adult learning (DuFour; Hord). Certainly, the research-based foundation suggests that principals are the key individuals to influence factors affecting teacher collaboration in America’s secondary schools where large-scale
teacher collaboration is not occurring and where teaching in isolation is pervasive (Barth, 2001; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Schmoker; Whitaker, 2003).

Finally, this chapter provides a concluding analysis of findings, recommendations, and implications. These should provide an invitation to consider the possibilities of further investigations that may probe further into the complexities of teacher collaboration and its dynamic relationship with school culture.

Conclusions

Using prior research as a foundation, this qualitative multi-case study attempted to examine a central question as to how various practicing secondary principals in the Northwest Region of Arkansas perceived the teacher collaboration process within their secondary schools. The findings that emerged from the data collected through participant focus group interviews suggest that a formal structure of teacher collaboration had a positive impact on the overall school culture in all the secondary schools studied. This chapter will discuss the findings as they relate to the research questions.

How Did The Process Unfold?

The principals indicated factors that they felt were important influences on the unfolding of the teacher collaboration process. The first general factor described by the principals were in the areas of having informal conversations with their staff for the purpose of building trust and reducing divisions and factions within their faculties before beginning a formal effort of teacher collaboration. Relationship building begins at the building level and any level of success in teacher collaboration must begin by establishing trust. Principals in this study found it important that the school culture and climate include feelings of trust and cooperation, with no divisions or factions within the
faculty. For better collaboration to develop, it is important for teachers to feel they are in a safe place (Covey, 2006; Fleming & Thompson, 2004).

Principals must model the appropriate traits and behaviors, including modeling the learning and collaborative style they want to see reflected in their teachers. The principal is the one on the front line in facilitating collaborative work, especially in the early stages of the process. Principals, in modeling what they want, attend the same meetings that teachers attend, support teachers and honor the teachers’ concerns, provide substitutes for teachers when training is needed, and provide a safe meeting environment for teachers. When principals put themselves in a supporting role, both physically and figuratively, they are perceived as a support and resource to the needs of collaboration (Whitaker, 2003).

The principals found success in facilitating teacher collaboration directly, as well as facilitating a future vision, based on the research. Principals took great care in setting up their collaborative groups. Principals made the collaborative work possible by carving time out of the existing school day for teachers to meet. They also asked other teachers and curriculum coaches to conduct in-house professional development and hired substitutes so their teachers could get training. Principals found that when they served as an advocate to meet the needs of their teachers, it helped them acquire more trust from the faculty and reduced resistance to change.

The principals directly facilitated teacher collaboration by putting a structured meeting time in place to do so, leading discussions about a shared vision, co-teaching at appropriate times, discussions on curricular issues and providing research-based strategies during team meetings. This personal involvement supports the idea that the
principal should be the leader of a professional learning community (DuFour & Eaker, 1998) and compliments the research that indicates the need to create meaningful collaborative opportunities (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Morrissey & Cowan, 2004). It is also an indicator that principals are responsible for setting the vision for a professional learning community (DuFour & Eaker; Hord, 1997).

According to the participating principals, the process included networking with professional organizations during the unfolding of teacher collaboration. In order to be prepared for teaching in such a complex, multi-faceted context, teachers require powerful professional development learning experiences, and such professional development is vital for teaching in secondary schools. By attending such conferences such as the Willard Daggett Model Schools Conference, the National Middle Schools Conference, the SREB High Schools That Work Conference, the Arkansas Leadership Academy, and the University of Arkansas Fort Smith Educational Renewal, principals were given strong supporting research and real-life examples to assist in the development of teacher collaboration during the early and fragile stages of the effort. According to Schmoker (2006), school leaders should take stock of what is needed to improve and do whatever it takes to develop the capacity for the organization to make the needed changes, including providing opportunities and resources to get the training necessary for the results desired.

**What Were The Major Events In The Process?**

The fact that major events usually happen during any change process is documented in the literature. Schmoker (2006), Reeves (2006) and DuFour (2004) indicate that there are purposeful events that happen during school reform as school...
leaders shape events and procedures to ensure teacher collaboration time during the school day. The findings of this study concur with this previous research.

The most frequent forms of collaborative practices cited in terms of major events included educational structural change such as modifying the master schedule, a principal moving to a new or different principal position, and attending professional meetings, conferences, or workshops to obtain research-based practices.

Educational structural change included changing the master schedule to accommodate teacher collaboration. Scheduling the time in the school day was received well and allowed time in the schedule for peer visitation. The collaborative work scheduled in the team meeting time allowed participants to work with their teachers on issues of curriculum and instruction, as well as to make shared decisions on difficult issues. The participating principals also used this time to build leadership capacity with their leadership teams. This structured time kept every team member connected to the vision of what the school was doing. It was noted that every team meeting in this structured time had a concrete agenda to not waste the time of the teachers. If student work was reviewed, the next meeting time was used to see what improvements developed on the student work. Incorporating up-front time in the transition to a collaborative culture is a critically important step in the effort. The availability of up-front time is especially important when teachers are working collaboratively on curriculum design and development, because this work involves a great amount of time in addition to regular classroom duties, and can result in stress and frustration (Adelman & Walking-Eagle, 1997).
It is often a major event when a new principal assumes leadership at a school. In one instance, the change to a new district was the major event that led to an understanding that using collaboration to gather information that leads to a final decision is one way of hearing more voices to make a more informed decision. It was a realization that the bigger the decision, the more input is needed to make that decision. In another instance, a young man became a principal and came to the understanding that no one person could know everything and be able to tell everybody what to do. Both principals used these significant events to build strong relationships with their staff, and in turn, they gained the respect of their staff. Both principals indicated the teaching staffs at their schools, though strong, still depended on their leadership to sustain the collaborative work.

The need for an effective principal does not decrease with the empowerment of teachers. In order for innovations such as teacher collaboration to be successful, principals must supervise the many intricacies of the school simultaneously with the school improvement effort. The principal, as the instructional leader in a school, must support the processes necessary to enable teachers to work together both for their own learning and for overall school improvement (Fleming, 2004; Fullan, 1997).

Attending professional meetings, conferences, and workshops were cited as major events in the unfolding of teacher collaboration at the school sites. The conferences of choice were the Model Schools Conference, the National Middle Schools Conference, and the hosting of Barkley (2005) who authored Quality Teaching in a Culture of Coaching.
Model Schools has a collegial group called the *Successful Practices Network*, which gave assistance to two practicing principals in their quest to implement teacher collaboration. It was a major financial commitment that gave credibility to the principals as they invested a large share of their financial resources to connecting with this model of school improvement. The principals took teams of teachers out of state on two occasions to look at exemplary programs.

The middle school conferences were attended by several of the principals because of the emphasis placed on teaming in the middle school philosophy. The primary goal for these principals was to see what other schools were doing and then create their own vision of what they wanted to take place in terms of teacher collaboration. The result was to begin using only research based practices as they started collaborating in team meetings.

One principal declared that time spent with Barkley (2005) in his model of collaborating through coaching was a major event in the process of developing teacher collaboration. It served as a way to develop a vision of collaboration for the school and to know that the things a team was experiencing as the process unfolded were common to most educators that embarked on developing a collaborative culture. Engaging in this coaching model put everyone on a level playing field as they all heard the same message, and the staff learned about working collaboratively sitting together which further enhanced their collegial strength. Barkley relates coaching as a relationship between two equals, one of whom is committed to making personal and professional improvements. When administrators and teachers together undertake a coaching program, school wide collegial support develops and a collaborative culture is enriched.
All of the major events discussed made it possible for the principals participating in this study to provide the conditions necessary to support collaboration fully and successfully. Changing the organizational structure, the hiring of a new principal for a school, and attending professional conferences were all recognized in the research as major events that had an effect on teacher collaboration. Major events can have an effect on school reform initiatives such as teacher collaboration (Reeves, 2006).

**What Were The Barriers To The Process?**

In the area of time, principals noted that teachers have competing demands on their time that makes it difficult to manage time and find time to meet. In addition, principals have to find time to meet, and some of the allotted time is taken up by unplanned emergencies or interruptions. To complicate the time issue further, teachers sometimes have a bad attitude about giving up any time to collaborate with others. The problem of time management is cited by the research of Hord (1997). Teachers need time to meet together and discuss curriculum and instruction as well as time to make shared decisions.

Leadership capacity within the school was a factor that acted as a barrier to collaboration, according to the principals. Leadership capacity that facilitates collaboration among teachers is required in order to share the essential knowledge and skills with people in order to develop a collaborative environment. Fullan (2001) believes that building capacity in people is necessary if leaders are to implement change efforts successfully. Moving from an isolated teaching environment in secondary schools to a collaborative environment would certainly require discovering, exploring, adopting, and implementing ideas and strategies that have successfully developed leadership capacity in
others. Lambert (1998) noted that “a constructivist philosophy of learning must be adopted to develop a culture where all teachers learn to improve their own craft and are depended on for leadership in teacher collaboration” (p. 78).

Principals feel that teachers’ resistance to change was considered a barrier to teacher collaboration. It was considered important that teachers, who are negative, unhappy, or unwilling to cooperate, prevent meaningful collaboration in secondary schools. Additionally, some teachers are not risk takers. These teachers were referred to as CAVE people or Citizens Against Virtually Everything, by a participating principal. This finding repeats the call for a culture of trust and respect found in the research literature on collaborative professional learning communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 1997). If authentic teacher collaboration is to occur, teachers must be willing to make changes, cooperate with colleagues in an environment where they are safe and free to take risks, and develop the respect to not feel inferior (Piccardi, 2005).

Relationships within the school were a factor that acted as a barrier to collaboration. Relationships that are close and cooperative are seen as a basic condition of teacher collaboration (Boyd & Hord, 1994; DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Principals in this study found it difficult to mend relationships to the point of complete participation in teacher collaboration. Jealousies, envies, disrespect, and professional arrogance were some of the issues that raised emotional issues within their teaching staff and in turn, caused relationship problems that prevented successful teacher collaboration, according to one principal.

Principals also perceived that lack of money was a significant barrier to teacher collaboration. One principal specifically called for funding to pay for teachers’ time that
would provide a conference period and a collaborative period for every secondary teacher. The type of funding would be unprecedented if it were to be a unilateral decision. Administrative support for shared learning is essential (Martin, 2008).

If these barriers were removed, principals involved in this study believed they could provide the vision, time, and support to their teachers to develop successful teacher collaboration. They felt they could develop a culture of trust and respect, in which teachers are willing to make changes and cooperate with their colleagues. The underlying theme of the principals is that teacher collaboration will take time and money as well as a supportive district office.

Who Were The Important Participants? How Did They Participate?

Principal participation was the number one response to this question. The principals in this study all perceived that teacher collaboration begins with “me.” The principals believed that being present to lead and participate in team meetings and participating in professional development with teachers was exceptionally conducive to building a professional learning community. Principals are so essential in helping everyone learn their roles and modeling what they want in a collaborative environment.

Although the description of a professional learning community includes increased teacher involvement in leadership, the school principal’s example is very important in modeling the leadership behavior desired for all. (Marzano, 2003). Gruenert (2005) agrees, suggesting that principal leadership to develop a supportive climate and collaborative culture must address the issue of teacher collaboration.

Principals cited instructional facilitators or curriculum coaches as important participants in the process. They felt it was critical to find that leader who could facilitate
the collaborative work and also provide the needed content knowledge. It was noted that not every principal had highly effective curriculum coaches or instructional facilitators to support the collaborative effort.

According to several principals, practicing to give feedback on new learning is one of the most important professional development opportunities for teachers. Instructional facilitators or curriculum coaches were cited as the primary facilitators of in learning how to develop this practice. This skill may be learned in a coaching model. Along the way, there must be specific embedded professional development for teachers, as well as common planning time to coach and support one another. This is where specific professional development in coaching strategies would be very helpful:

“Coaching is a relationship between two equals, one of whom is committed to making personal and professional improvements” (Barkley, 2005, p. 4)

One principal in this study mentioned the 100% rule. The whole idea is that there is strength in numbers and to make the decisions on every kid requires the input of every teacher. The teachers are the most important participants because they are the ones who ultimately decide to work together to become better teachers and better learners. The resulting support and feedback from colleagues has a bonus effect—teachers at the same school develop a synergy of creativity. When teachers participate together as a complete unit, school-wide collegial support develops, students receive the benefit of an improved teacher in their classrooms, administrators receive the respect and support from an admire and productive staff, and all receive the caring and support of each other. As a result, a quality learning experience occurs for students and throughout the professional learning community (Barkley, 2005).
How Were The Program Participants (Teachers) Changed By The Process? How Were The Non-Program Participants (Other Teachers, Staff, Administrators, Etc.) Changed By The Process?

The findings suggested that the participants over time showed the characteristics of relational trust (Byrk & Schneider, 2002). As the process progressed, teachers developed trust within the group and with each other individually. The participants became more open with each other and gained additional respect for the professional abilities of one another. Some participants in this study talked of “transformation” in their teachers in which a teacher would move from being very ineffective within the group to a leader within the group. Another principal participant spoke of “miraculous” change in a teacher. The findings also indicated that the participants felt less isolated when they began to work together on matters of educational importance in which their work made a difference in the lives of students.

The findings also suggested teachers had “eye-opening” experiences as they began to experience things from different perspectives. The participants began to learn from each other that inspired new ideas and the participants came to look forward to working together on educational issues. They asserted that relationships must be authentic and founded on mutual respect. Supportive personal conditions of respect and trust among colleagues must be in place and are vital to the success of the professional learning community (Byrk & Schneider, 2002; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hargreaves, 1994).

Principals reported an increase in the self-efficacy in the participants. Those traits mentioned where efficacy was noted were maturity, leadership, confidence, and
competence. Trust in an educational setting means that principals will treat teachers with respect, and confidence will be expressed in their integrity and their abilities. In turn, according to Covey (2006), if teachers and other school leaders will base their relationships on trust as described within this context, then the politics of work, the burnout, the bureaucracy, the ethical violations, and any other barrier imaginable can be dealt with effectively.

It was also noted that teachers became more reflective and began to think differently about how they were teaching and examining the proof of whether their students were getting what they taught. They began to think about how to teach lessons better. In general, it became a continual state of reflection because of collaborating with others. Blase & Blase (2001) suggest that promoting reflection is one action that greatly encourages teacher collaboration.

Non-program participants identified were resistant teachers, reluctant teachers, support personnel such as counselors and media specialists, and non-certified employees. Interestingly enough, the principals in this study perceived that resistant teachers could change, reluctant teachers could be brought along, and including support personnel as well as non-certified employees in the collaborative time is important in strengthening the entire collaborative effort.

Non-participants such as the employees mentioned above sometimes feel isolated from the group. Findings from this study confirm the work of DuFour and Eaker (1998) in their belief that feelings of isolation are reduced when opportunities for meaningful collaboration are embedded into the work of teaching. Principals revealed that particular attention has to be paid to planning the collaborative meetings, from planning and
distributing the agenda, to the type of snacks prepared, as well as the arrangement of the room (Fitzgerald, 2005)

The findings demonstrated that the success of the work depended on the input and cooperation of resistant or reluctant teachers, the educational information held by counselors and media specialists and the support of colleagues from the non-certified staff. It was indicated by participating principals that isolation was often removed as they provided more information to the non-participants and they were given an opportunity to provide input into the conversation. These findings support previous research that suggests interdependence is hindered when job requirements do not allow for professional interactions around educational issues with colleagues from all departments. Teachers have always been separated from one another in practice, an organizational process that hinders professional interdependence and collegiality (Lortie, 1975). Schools are designed both physically and organizationally to restrict teacher’s access to other professionals (Eisner, 1992).

What Strategies Did Secondary Principals Use To Support The Process?

Principals believed that setting norms for teacher collaboration provides structure and accountability for a collaborative effort. Norms such as a positive attitude, arriving on time, and the principal setting the proper example for behavior he/she is expecting from the teachers, are all important aspects of this leadership strategy. Leadership capacities such as broad-based, skillful participation and established norms of collaboration must be expanded in individual school leaders in order to move secondary teachers from the comfort of the isolated classroom into a collaborative professional learning community that enhances student achievement (Lambert, 1998).
Principals cited providing support to collaboration through human and material resources as a critical strategy in developing a collaborative culture. Participating principals named human support from the principal in modeling the behavior and actions he/she desires, technology support in the form of equipment, supplies and personnel, substitute teachers to support teachers’ absences for professional growth, providing data to support data-driven decision making, and survey results from students that reflect the strengths and weaknesses of the school are cited as examples of human and materials resource support. When collaborative teachers want to improve their practice, they seek the input of resources, including human resources, which will help the changes to be genuine (Piccardi, 2005).

These findings support previous research that suggests school leadership must support this expectation of teacher collaboration with leadership actions, including being sensitive to the allocation of their time as well as material resources. Working together, they may reduce their individual planning time but stand to greatly increase the available pool of ideas and materials. Schools become better prepared and organized to examine new ideas, methods, and materials. The faculty becomes adaptable and self-reliant. Teachers are organized to ease the strain of staff turnover, both by providing systematic professional assistance to beginners and by explicitly socializing all newcomers, including veteran teachers, to staff values, traditions, and resources (Inger, 1993).

Principals in this study felt strongly that leadership must be distributed to others in the building for the purpose of conducting team meetings and leading professional development during the school day. Several principals indicated that distributed
leadership to do collaborative work, and ensuring that the process was an integral part of the everyday business at the school were a part of the school culture.

One principal suggested that the best way to ensure a strong team of leaders was to make sure that distributed leadership was discussed during the interviewing and hiring process. In other words, if the principal hires the right people, the principal can guarantee adding to the distributed leadership. Whitaker (2003) supports the importance of hiring the right people and gives principals real strategies of trust and respect to take control of their destiny as school leaders. Whitaker indicates that the principal will be respectful to students and hire compassionate, highly skilled teachers capable of leading others and committed to creating a caring and effective learning culture where all students and staff members are respected.

The principals believe that teacher retention is a strategy that supports distributed leadership and the teacher collaboration process. Keeping the right people and keeping them growing seemed to be very important to the principals in this study. Another cited keeping influential teachers, keeping them growing, and giving them time to work together enhanced teacher collaboration greatly. These principals are supported by research. In the 1996 publication, *What Matters Most: Teaching for America’s Future*, the National Commission of Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF, 2002) made a point that cites a direct relationship between low teacher retention rates in public schools and the lack of teacher collaboration. The missing ingredient in teacher retention is suggested to be finding a way for school systems to organize the work of qualified teachers so they can collaborate with colleagues and all become leaders in developing
strong professional learning communities that will sustain them as they become more accomplished teachers.

As school policy-makers examine new ways of teaching that are more conducive to this shared work, it is important that they do not take a view of the shared day as an addition to the day. Principals also mentioned how creative they had to be to carve out time during the school day to collaborate. The message participating principals sent was that shared work is of such importance that it must be embedded into the everyday practice of teaching. DuFour and Eaker (1998) support the principals in this study and suggest that meaningful collaboration must be systemically embedded into the daily life of the school if professional learning communities are to be built. Finding job-embedded time for teachers to work together, building trusting relationships, and providing the structures for collaborative work will help to move the practice of teaching from isolation to collaboration (Fitzgerald, 2005).

The finding of job-embedded collaborative time as a strategy to support teacher collaboration was agreed upon by all principals who participated in this study. The problem for some was that they viewed this strategy as impossible without extra compensation for the teachers. All agreed that the idea of asking teachers to give of their time to collaborate was a definite paradigm shift in thinking.

**What Training And Professional Development Did Secondary Principals Sue To Improve The Process?**

The principals in this study realized that the master schedule often directed how decisions were made and within the master schedule were “sacred cows” such as band and athletics. The participating principals had struggles from within concerning the
dilemma of making change in those sacred cows at the risk of upsetting tradition and expectations of superintendents and school boards in their respective communities. In other words, hard conversations have to occur to determine what the real priorities must be in developing a collaborative environment. Research supports these principals in changing traditions and stubborn mindsets in the community to make room for teacher collaboration. Schedules, staff assignments, and access to resources must be made conducive to shared work where teachers learn together, work together toward a common purpose, and take shared responsibility in the continuous learning of their students (Inger, 1993).

In a case study of one high school’s effort at developing teacher collaboration, the findings suggested that the policy and practice of developing collaborative time must become a priority. There must be common planning time regularly scheduled and embedded in the school day as well as other release time for collaboration (Inger, 1993). Fitzgerald (2005) makes a recommendation for providing teachers with regularly scheduled time for collegial work and planning.

To gain the research and information needed to launch a collaborative effort, many of the participants in the focus group interviews felt it was important to connect to a national network to obtain the needed knowledge, skills, and expertise to do so. The principals had participated in various national initiatives such as Daggett’s Successful Practices Network, the National Middle School Conference, Southern Region Educational Board’s (SREB) High Schools That Work, as well as a coaching model brought to one district by Barkley (2005) entitled, Quality Teaching in a Culture of Coaching.
Literature on this concept supports the principals’ perceptions that they may need outside training to obtain the knowledge and expertise necessary to lead a collaborative effort in their schools. Various processes to reflect and share best practices, such as coaching and mentoring, action research, and professional networking opportunities, encourage teacher collaboration in job-embedded professional development opportunities (Wood & McQuarrie, 1999).

The principals in this study all agreed that training in professional learning communities that would support the principals in their efforts to get teachers to become more reflective was essential. The principals in this study spent professional development time visiting or revisiting the concepts of a professional learning community. Researchers agree with the principals in this study concerning the importance of professional learning communities and the value they bring to the entire collaborative effort.

Researchers over the last decade and beyond offer that sustained, substantive school improvement will be best realized when schools learn to function as professional learning communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 1997). A professional learning community can be described as a community of learners where adults and students alike are engaged as active learners in matters of special importance and where everyone encourages everyone else’s learning (Barth, 2001). Principals in this study agree that obtaining all the training available will assist them in building a professional learning community centered on teacher collaboration.

**What Were The Outcomes From The Process For School Personnel And Students?**

The principals indicated that life is about the relationships people build with other people, and the attitudes of the adults involved in teacher collaboration are much more
positive after having been involved in the process of teacher collaboration. Research further suggests that working in isolation contributes to a negative attitude found in many schools among educators, while developing a collaborative work environment in secondary schools enriches and extends the careers of many that have chosen secondary education as their career (Fitzgerald, 2005). When teachers are enriched, supported, and energized, students find their experiences in the teachers’ classrooms more motivational (Reeves & Allison, 2009). This research supports the principals’ perceptions that an outcome of teacher collaboration is job satisfaction that leads to teacher retention.

Sometimes teachers leave because of the teacher collaboration process according to participating principals. Sometimes teachers just moved on with their lives and that departure or ejection of the unsatisfied teacher actually made the collaborative process work better. Research, though limited, does support the outcome noted by the participating principals that teachers sometimes feel so overwhelmed with the process that they leave. Secondary teachers develop a very autonomous attitude grounded in their privacy, and often they simply want to be left alone. Teachers often think that what others are doing is none of their business and will only support another teacher or answer questions when asked. There is a very high value placed on autonomy, and veteran teachers have very strong and sometimes aggressive views, in support of the whole concept of autonomy that causes them to be resistant or even leave (Inger, 1993).

Principals in this study indicate that the quality of instruction improves and that improvement should be considered an outcome of the teacher collaboration process. Every teacher potentially has the opportunity to improve their instruction. Because the quality of instruction is better, principals report that students are able to think and
articulate their thoughts at a deeper level about the content they are studying. Principals are strongly supported by research in their belief that an outcome of teacher collaboration is an improvement in the quality of instruction. Although other variables may contribute to the students’ performance on exams, these data suggest that access, equity, and quality of instruction may be contributing factors as well. One of the most important factors in a student’s success may be effective teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Marzano, 2003). The principals stated that to the extent that effective teaching is an important factor in a student’s success, each school then has the responsibility to improve teacher effectiveness as an outcome of the collaborative process.

The quality of instruction is improved as teachers hear more positive things from their peers and begin to understand that what they are doing is making a difference in the lives of kids. Teacher collaboration is one practice that has been identified as valuable about teacher effectiveness (Fullan, 1997; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). Evidence suggests that teachers can better improve their instructional practice when they collaborate with their fellow teachers (Barth, 2001; Hord, 1999; Lambert, 1998).

Principals in the study suggested that teacher collaboration might contribute to moral purpose for some teachers. This suggestion provides impetus for consideration of moral purpose as one factor in developing collaborative processes in schools. Indeed, researchers agree that moral purpose does exist in the leadership capacity of some educators wishing to make sustainable changes toward a more collaborative environment in secondary schools (Covey, 2006; Reeves & Allison, 2009). Fullan (2001) points to capacities and attributes as necessary characteristics for a strong leader. The capacities
that he sees as important are moral purpose, building relationships, understanding change, coherence making, and knowledge creation/sharing.

More supporting evidence to enhance the principals’ beliefs that teacher collaboration is strengthened by moral purpose comes from the work of Wheatley (2005). Research often speaks of principal behavior in terms of strategies, but the work of Wheatley sheds great insight and deep perspective on how leaders can really move people. She speaks of leaders who live a new story. Leaders who live in the new story help others to understand themselves differently by the way they lead. They trust humanness; they welcome the surprises brought to them by others. They delight in others’ inventiveness, they nurture others, and they connect people. According to Wheatley, principals’ work must have a sound philosophical base which speaks to the deep work one must do with people to develop a larger purpose. Wheatley’s assertions lend credibility to one principal in this study that teacher collaboration becomes strengthened if it has moral purpose as a supporting capacity.

The principals’ perception that increased student achievement was an outcome of the teacher collaboration process is supported by research, although this investigation was limited in the ability to make such a causal claim. Success in student achievement includes leadership by example, including leadership by teachers who place the interests of students first by committing to their own effort of continuous learning in a collaborative culture (Reeves, 2009).

Research states that the principals’ knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment must combine with his/her professional behavior that models the importance of making increased student achievement a major purpose of the collaborative effort as
important factors in promoting teacher collaboration. The principal must articulate the belief that teacher collaboration is consistent with the belief that high expectations for all students and improved student achievement are the purposes of schooling. To do this, the principal must consistently communicate a personal belief that collaboration around shared goals will result in increased student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005).

With all the proceeding information in the discussion of major findings, principals and other educational leaders may improve their efforts to achieve higher levels of teacher collaboration, and thus higher levels of student achievement. The practice of teacher collaboration will positively influence the achievement of students. How secondary principals prepare and create the conditions that support that practice is important.

Finally, the principals state that one outcome of the teacher collaboration process is the belief that teacher collaboration is one emerging possibility for the future success of secondary education in the Northwest Arkansas region, the state, and the nation as a whole. The uneasiness and uncertainty that the future holds will be tempered by the process of teacher collaboration as teachers share the work and support each other through adversity. There is a certain awareness that the future of secondary education may depend heavily on the success of teacher collaboration in our secondary schools. Fullan (2001) asserts that a culture of care was vital for successful performance of organizations by allowing organizational members to feel safe enough to explore new horizons. The culture of care that supported successful teacher collaboration were contained in the five dimensions of mutual trust, active empathy, access to help, lenience in judgment and courage.
Surrounding and supporting those principals leading teacher collaboration work are attributes of energy, enthusiasm, and hope. Fullan (2001) says that these capacities, which exist in varying degrees in all effective leaders, must be readily apparent to those who are attempting to develop a hopeful future. Fullan believes that as these attributes intermingle in effective leaders, the result will be that more good things will happen which in turn diminishes the negative.

**Limitations**

As suggested in chapter three, there are specific limitations that could affect the reporting and analysis of the data from this study. Among the limitations, is the relationship the researcher had with some of the participants in the focus groups, unintended assumptions of the researcher due to having known the principals participating in the focus groups, and the short duration of the study. Another limitation is that the reported outcomes on instruction and student achievement are perceptions. The anecdotal evidence in this investigation could be triangulated with quantitative data to suggest more meaningful implications. Finally, it must be acknowledged that this study is not generalized to other groups as it only sought to inform the practice of principals in a regionalized area.

This study was from the population of practicing principals in the Northwest Region of Arkansas and the research was intended to present an in-depth understanding of the topic of teacher collaboration from practicing principals, thereby building on the existing knowledge base of other research in this area. As others review the findings of this research, they can decide if replicating the methodology with other participants may
add breadth to these findings, as well as earlier findings of other researchers (Shank, 2002).

**Recommendations**

Because of this study, an image has unfolded of what some practicing secondary principals from the Northwest Arkansas Region face as they attempt to expand and sustain teacher collaboration in their schools. The following recommendations are based upon the findings of this study.

Principals should work with superintendents, school boards, state legislatures, and their congressmen to seek funding to pay for teacher collaboration time built into the school day. Principals mentioned scheduling a conference period for planning and a collaborative period for embedded professional development weekly in the school day for every teacher.

Principals should work with the district to build at least one collaborative period into the school day for at least one day per week regardless of new funding. This is possible in Arkansas if state required preparation time is used over four days with the fifth day being used for team meetings where embedded professional development is provided and shared decision-making occurs.

They should additionally connect with a formal network of colleagues (outside one’s own school) to gain support for the collaborative effort in the early stages. The networks of support for the participants in this study were often formal national, state, or local networks such as *High Schools That Work* (Southern Regional Education Board), the *Willard Daggett Model Schools* (Successful Practices Network), state and national
Middle School Associations, Arkansas Leadership Academy Team Institute, and a partnership with the University of Arkansas Fort Smith Educational Renewal.

Moreover, principals should address structural or personnel changes in the school to set in place the groundwork for teacher collaboration:

- Training is available to regarding building master schedules. Principals can take this training in order to understand how to reduce scheduling conflicts without breaking any laws on required instructional time.
- If teacher collaboration is philosophically non-negotiable to the principal and it is not happening in his/her school, resistant teachers or the principal should consider relocating to a different philosophical environment if possible. One principal noted that he took a transfer for this very reason.

An opportunity exists for school principals to confront the barriers identified in this study as they work with their leadership teams. By collaborating, the leadership teams will be able to have conversations on pertinent issues and build plans to eliminate some of the barriers by:

- Increasing leadership capacity within the school with a trained leadership team that has the ability to facilitate agenda items to keep teachers on task.
- Making collaborative time a top priority that is not canceled or moved.

Principals must assertively go after the support they need to implement teacher collaboration successfully in their buildings. They should identify natural leaders and bring them on board by:
• Understanding that natural leaders are the strength of the faculty. When they are on board, everyone else follows. It is important for the principal to get them on their side.

• Recognizing that new teachers should visit the informal leaders’ classrooms during their prep period to watch teaching and learning taking place, followed by shared dialogue.

• Nurturing informal leaders to eventually become a part of the formal leadership team. In other words, principals can grow their own leaders.

Principals should motivate teachers and non-certified staff to become involved in collaboration because the involvement will likely bring about real change in both participants and non-participants. This larger effort requires unity of the entire staff to be very successful. Thus, these efforts might include:

• Modeling the collaborative behaviors, positive attitudes, and actions the principal expects from his/her staff.

• Supporting marginal teachers with increased professional development and training to transform to becoming effective leaders in the eyes of their students and their peers.

• Including non-participants other than teachers (library media specialists and counselors), non-certified staff, and non-traditional staff (custodians, bus drivers, and teacher aides) and respecting their input.

Principals must continue to improve on strategies that facilitate collaboration. Principals must also share the responsibility for facilitating such strategies. For example, teacher collaboration improves when the principal is present, but can the presence of another
effective teacher leader improve teacher collaboration? Looking at the findings of this study, school leaders might suggest the following strategies to see whether improvement can be made in teacher collaboration:

- Set norms for teacher collaboration, with the number one norm being active participation by the principal.
- Seek district level support of in terms of human and material resources so teachers are not bogged down with not having their material or human resource support needs met.
- Distribute the leadership in team meetings and professional development work to encourage teacher collaboration to become pervasive in the school culture.
- Develop a culture of continuous improvement, where the principal and staff must always ask, “Who’s not learning? Why?” and “What are we going to do about it?”
- Commit to embedding the collaborative work and meetings in the school day, regardless of the challenges.

Principals must plan and participate in trainings and professional development to improve teacher collaboration. Participants in this study also wanted to collaborate with other principals more often. Some districts were large enough for this to happen, while others only had one principal per district. To accomplish the needed training and professional development, principals must:

- Meet informally and go to state or national conferences in connection with their professional organization, because the benefits of collaboration are just as beneficial for principals as they are for teachers.
Attend training in scheduling to learn how to change the master schedule and build changes within the school day.

Attend national trainings and professional development or bring in outside experts to the site if the knowledge and skills regarding collaboration are lacking locally.

Become familiar with the Professional Learning Community Model. The central component of a professional learning community is teacher collaboration. That professional development should reach staff and they too should understand what it means to be in a professional learning community.

Provide training and professional development embedded in the school day that is research-based and applied daily.

Principals in this study found reaching positive outcomes in teacher collaboration to be challenging, frustrating, and complex, but recommended:

- Understanding that teacher collaboration is a complex process and it is important to have the end in mind when beginning the process.

- Communicating to those people wishing to develop a collaborative culture to be prepared for negativity, opposition, and setbacks, but to persevere in the effort.

- Having a sound philosophical base from which to approach the building of a collaborative culture.

- Speaking to and lobbying for the idea that teacher collaboration is an emerging and powerful strategy for future success of secondary education.
• Building a model of professional development for their school with teacher collaboration as a nucleus for potential success.

• Using the collaborative approach to deal with the many technological changes coming at us. We must have teachers working together by talking and sharing if we are to meet these fast-paced changes and innovations of the future successfully.

• Suggesting that teacher collaboration could become a work of moral purpose to many who advocate this effort. To accomplish the ultimate goals and the ultimate tasks (improved instruction/higher student achievement), the context of the work could be strengthened if it becomes a work of moral purpose.

Implications

Significance

The findings of this study expanded the knowledge base regarding teacher collaboration as an effective way to improve teacher performance and concurrently improve student achievement. Practicing principals located at schools in Northwest Arkansas who were implementing collaborative cultures were used in focus group interviews to gather information regarding their beliefs and practices. This research acknowledges that principal leadership is vital to enhancing collaborative behavior among teachers and in replicating exemplary practices.

Many factors influence whether the culture and climate of a school are conducive to collaboration among secondary teachers. This study focused on what principals perceive to be important characteristics that must be in place so that secondary school leaders can create and enhance the opportunities for teacher collaboration.
In order to understand how to promote a collaborative climate, it was crucial to identify the barriers to collaboration, as such barriers hamper the efforts to transition to a more collaborative environment. The barriers described in this study can be shared with colleagues and policy makers to promote improvements in other secondary schools.

In the process of this study, successful leadership strategies were identified that will support school leaders in their effort to build a collaborative culture in their school. The fundamental process of building leadership capacity among teachers and principals was researched to add to the body of knowledge regarding the relationship of teacher collaboration to an improved school culture. This creates potential for improved school leadership overall and enhanced opportunities for success for both students and teachers at other secondary schools.

One practical application of this study was identifying the training and support that principals and other school leaders need to confront the challenge, and possibly the hostility, to developing a collaborative culture in the secondary school workplace. Leadership capacities such as broad-based, skillful participation and established norms of collaboration must be expanded in individual school leaders in order to move secondary teachers from the comfort of the isolated classroom into a collaborative professional learning community that enhances student achievement (Lambert, 1998).

The research findings of this study provided additional information regarding how principals and teachers can lead their schools toward a more collaborative culture with the ultimate goal of student achievement increasing for all students. In the future, other secondary education researchers may build on this information to further help secondary educators improve the available information concerning factors that affect secondary
teacher collaboration. Important questions for future research might include the following: What alternative funding sources might be available to support teacher collaboration within the school day in secondary schools? What is the correlation between teacher collaboration in secondary schools and student achievement? Can the impact of teacher collaboration on student achievement be quantified? Are the results of this current study replicated in other geographic and demographic areas?

**Unexpected Results**

Byrk and Schneider (2002) assert that relationships founded on relational trust are important to the development of successful collaboration and ultimately to the improvement of student learning. They use the phrase *relational trust* as an overarching term to include the components of respect, personal regard, competence, and integrity (Fitzgerald, 2005). It was unexpected that these assertions of Byrk and Schneider would actually emerge within the focus groups and between the focus groups and the researcher. There were several comments in each focus group pertaining to how much the participants enjoyed the interview process, and participants thanked the researcher for allowing the participants a venue to collaborate as principals. Participants noted an improvement in their own learning and a more comprehensive understanding of teacher collaboration after going through the collaborative exercise (focus group interviews).

While this multi-case study only addressed teacher-teacher and principal-teacher relationships, it was interesting to note that these segments of the school population are not all inclusive parts necessary to the type of collaboration that has to exist if a school is to be successful. The principal must develop relational trust in his or her school district with other principals, parents, students and non-certified employees because Byrk and
Schneider (2002) also note the need for everyone within and external to an organization to work together.

Another unexpected finding in this study was how instrumental and important the development of a common set of beliefs, values, organizational routines, and individual behaviors are to the success of student and adult learning. This common set of expectations for all creates an organizational culture of collaboration.

**Expanding New Knowledge Bases**

Finding new ways to reorganize existing time to increase collaborative opportunities embedded in the school day must be explored further. For school policy makers this means giving serious consideration to revising the organization of teacher schedules, reorganizing the school day, eliminating or paying for non-academic teacher duties, and/or changing the rotation of class periods, to name just a few ideas. This hunt for time will take a focused effort by school administrators and will require change in existing traditions and policies in order to honor the commitment by any school district that chooses to support teacher collaboration.

Finding new ways to reorganize time is not the only knowledge base that needs to be expanded. Human traits of trust, respect, and openness to improvement will greatly promote the success of teacher collaboration; but unfortunately, the human condition prevents those traits from always being in place for every employee. In order to work with the imperfection of the human condition, those interested in developing a collaborative culture must pay attention to the moods, attitudes, and beliefs of peers. The human resource component of developing trusting relationships must garner attention and further consideration in terms of how to support employees emotionally, psychologically,
and sociologically, as they work together. Leadership and support that is servant-driven and in which people look after one another through random acts of kindness, no matter how small, deserve further on-going research to ascertain their role in the support of successful teacher collaboration.

The expectations for teachers have changed dramatically due to the accountability measures in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Teachers are now held accountable for test scores within their individual classrooms. As accountability has ratcheted up, there has never before been a greater need for teachers to have the opportunity to work together to address the challenges brought on by this great attention to accountability. There must be more activities and support developed in the base of knowledge to assist teachers in curriculum meetings, team meetings, and trainings/professional development that will give teachers real strategies and methodologies to keep up with the demands of accountability.

Although principals participating in this study identified positive outcomes due to the collaborative culture in their school, this researcher believes there is ample evidence of too much isolation and/or faux collaboration in other Arkansas schools. Even in some schools where collaboration is occurring, some teachers believe it to be contrived. Precious meeting time should not only be used to distribute information and strategies, but also should be used for the collection of real input from teachers with real shared-decision making. It is essential that more knowledge and information be developed to discern the difference in true teacher collaboration and contrived teacher collaboration.

If fully integrated teacher collaboration is to become a common part of normal school practice, it is imperative that the school’s principal lead this effort with the proper
support. This study confirmed that this is not always the case. The on-going discussions and questions surrounding teacher collaboration for principals must be: What do I need to know about teacher collaboration, what new learning is available on the subject, how will I use this new information, and how will I be accountable for this new information now that I have it? If new information is available about teacher collaboration, it must be brought to the forefront for principals who desire to implement it. In such cases, principals in the district’s schools can model the behavior and learning necessary to promote the collaborative work model and create a collaborative culture. Otherwise, small pockets of teacher collaboration, such as were discovered in this research, will not pervade the secondary-level faculty as a whole.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Moderator’s Guide for Focus Group Interviews

I. Introduction: the research questions, the focus group process

II. Ice breaker: Get-to-know-you activity

III. Develop a shared operational definition of teacher collaboration

IV. Questions:
   1. How did the process unfold?
   2. What were the major events in the process?
   3. What are the most important dimensions of teacher collaboration to address?
   4. How do you see your role and your influence, as secondary principal, in developing and supporting teacher collaboration?
   5. Who were the important participants in the process? How did they participate?
   6. How were the program participants (teachers) changed by the process? How were non-program participant (teachers, staff, administrators, etc.) changed by the process?
   7. What gets in the way of teacher collaboration at your school?
   8. What are the underlying reasons for the barriers?
   9. What enables collaboration at your school?
  10. How do/will you overcome barriers to collaboration?
  11. How difficult is it to deal with the barriers to teacher collaboration?
  12. What are the benefits of teacher collaboration?
  13. What changes would have to happen in order for you to be able to overcome barriers (training, strategies, professional development, administration changes, physical supports, organizational changes . . . ?)
  14. What were the outcomes from the process for school personnel and students?
APPENDIX B

Nineteen Teacher Behaviors Defining Teacher Collaboration

1. Observe peers teaching
2. Plan lessons/units of study together
3. Participate in discussions of classroom practices
4. Coordinate grade level or content area activities
5. Develop teaching materials together
6. Reflect on teaching practice together
7. Engage in faculty study groups
8. Debrief/share learning from professional development
9. Engage in peer coaching
10. Seek each other as a resource for professional growth
11. Review students/school data together
12. Conduct action research jointly
13. Examine student work together
14. Meet and voice concerns about practice or classroom problems
15. Read and discuss professional literature together
16. Share ideas about teaching and learning
17. Discuss student problems together
18. Set and pursue group goals for professional development
19. Interact in a professional manner with colleagues
APPENDIX C
Checklist of Barriers and Facilitators

1. The way time is scheduled during the school day
2. The degree of the faculty's willingness to change
3. Agreement among teachers about effective practices
4. Staff commitment to collaboration
5. The availability of release time to observe exemplary practice
6. The availability of support personnel on and off site for teachers
7. Physical proximity/ distance of teachers to each other
8. State-level support for teacher collaboration
9. The communication structures and networks
10. The degree of trust and respect among colleagues
11. The degree of teachers' access to expertise
12. The degree to which the school, district is open to change
13. The amount of time the principal has to give personal attention to collaboration
14. The extent of faculty participation in school decision-making
15. The extent of competition among teachers
16. Professional development is directed at improving collaborative skills
17. The degree of teacher personality conflicts
18. Directives and incentives or lack of – for after-school work
APPENDIX D

Follow-up Invitation to Focus Group

Mr./Ms Principal of School
Example Secondary School
00 School Road
Any Town, AR 00000

Dear Mr./Ms Principal:

Thank you for accepting my invitation to participate in a focus group on factors affecting teacher collaboration. Your input is valuable and will contribute to a better understanding of what principals face.

The evening promises to be interesting. There will be up to 15 secondary principals in the group for discussion. We will have a variety of refreshments to share. Also, your name will be put into a drawing for a $30 gift certificate to Wal-Mart or 2 movie tickets, to be drawn at the end of the focus group.

The focus group will be held on:
   Wednesday, October Xth
   4:30 to 6:00 p.m.
   Van Buren School District Office
   2221 Pointer Trail East
   Van Buren, Arkansas 72956

Please let me know as soon as possible if you can’t make it. My numbers are: 479-474-7942 (work), 479-651-6555 (cell), 479-474-7394 (home).

I have enclosed a list of components of collaboration for your review. It is this list I will refer to in our discussion. We will discuss barriers and facilitators to collaboration as well, so I have included a list of those as well. Please bring these lists with you.

I look forward to seeing you. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Lonnie Myers
Doctoral Candidate
APPENDIX E

Informed Consent Form

Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership, Harding University Consent Forms for Principals’ Perceptions of Factors Affecting Teacher Collaboration in Secondary Schools

Dear Principal:

You are being asked to participate in the study described below. You should feel free to ask any questions about the research you wish. If you have questions now or at a later time, you may contact Lonnie Myers at 479-474-7942, or at lmyers@vbns.us.

This study will attempt to discover how secondary school principals perceive factors affecting teacher collaboration and how principals might improve teacher collaboration in their secondary schools. By understanding principals’ perceptions of the factors affecting teacher collaboration and the role of the secondary school principal, appropriate professional development and organizational support structures and processes can be designed and developed. The desired result will be improved student achievement.

You are being asked to participate in a focus group interview. In the focus group, you will be asked to participate in a discussion with the researcher and other secondary school principals from northwest Arkansas. This should take approximately 90 minutes.

For participating in this study, I will send you a summary of my findings by mail or email. The summary information, as well as the discussion itself, may be of benefit to you in your school improvement efforts.

Although you will be known by other participants in your focus group, your identity will remain confidential in any and all research reports. All data collected will remain secure and accessible only to the researcher. After a three year period, the data will be destroyed. Until that time, the transcribed data will be password secured in a laptop database. The video and audio tapes will be secured in a locked, fireproof filing cabinet in my home office.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate and discontinue your participation at any time with no penalty and without loss of benefits to which you would otherwise be entitled. If you are not satisfied with the way this study is conducted, you may express your concerns to my university advisor, Dr. Donny Lee at dlee@harding.edu or the Harding University Institutional Review Board at 501-279-4315.

Sincerely,

Lonnie Myers
Doctoral Candidate

I have read the consent form. My questions have been answered. My signature below indicates that I understand the information and that I consent to participate in this study.

Name of Participant __________________________ Signature of Participant __________________________ Date __________

Signature of Researcher __________________________ Date __________

(continued on next page)
Additional Consent For Audiotaping, Videotaping, And Transcription

This study involves audiotaping and videotaping of the focus group interview. No name or identifying information about you will be associated with the tape or transcript. Only the researcher (or someone to whom the speakers’ identities are unknown) will listen to the tape. The tape will be transcribed by the researcher (or someone to whom the speakers’ identities are unknown). Once the transcript is checked for accuracy, the tape will be erased. Some of the transcripts may be reproduced in presentations or reports on this research; however, no name or identifying information about will be used.

Please check one of each of these pairs of options:

Audio tape recording:
- ☐ I consent to having my interview audiotaped and videotaped.
- ☐ I do not consent to having my interview audiotaped and videotaped.

Transcription of focus group:
- ☐ I consent to having my taped interview transcribed into written form.
- ☐ I do not consent to having my taped interview transcribed into written form.

Use of transcript:
- ☐ I consent to the use of the written transcription of my interview in presentations and written documents resulting from the study if neither my name nor other identifying information will be associated with the transcript.
- ☐ I do not consent to the use of the written transcription of my interview in presentations and written documents resulting from the study.

Signature of Participant ____________________________ Date ________________

I hereby agree to abide by the participant’s instructions as indicated above.

Signature of Researcher ____________________________ Date ________________