APPLICATION OF TEACHER COLLABORATION IN EDUCATION SERVICE DELIVERY

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ABSTRACT

The paper aims at how to improve education service through exploring the practicable methods of teaching collaboration. The paper concerns with the relationship between the teacher collaboration and teaching. It highlights on how to establish an effective mechanic for administrative teacher collaboration to promote the collaborative awareness. Teacher collaboration is a joint social task in education, not an individual or specific one, which will be universally applied in the current teaching. The paper reveals the characterization of teacher collaboration deals with the concrete approaches of teacher collaboration in current school practice and gives some suggestions in practice.

Keywords: Teacher Collaboration, Co-teaching, Alternative teaching, Education Service

INTRODUCTION

Teachers' collaboration means many different things. They may refer to working together in a classroom to instruct a group of students, at other times they may be describing meetings they attend to discuss students who are transferring to the school, and they may also be reporting on the efforts of the school's staff development committee or any other situation in which they work closely with other teachers. Collaboration refers to how teachers are carrying out a specific task or activity, not the nature or purpose of the activity. Friend and Cook's (1992) definition of collaboration is intentionally general and takes this into account: "interpersonal 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"(1992, p. 5).

The paper aims at how to improve education service by the practices of teacher collaboration, concerns with the relationship between the teacher collaboration and teaching. It highlights on how to establish an effective mechanic for administrative teacher collaboration to promote the collaborative awareness. Besides, it answers the question that the teacher collaboration is a joint social task in education, not an individual or specific one, which will be universally applied in the current teaching. The paper deals with the concrete approaches of teacher collaboration in current school practice as well as reveals the characterization of teacher collaboration.

Research shows that collaboration between teachers can be a powerful tool for professional development and a driver for school improvement by providing "opportunities for adults across a school system to learn and think together about how to improve their practice in ways that lead to improved student achievement" (Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004, p. 2). When teacher participate the professional development that linked with school would improve their teaching.

ISSN-L: 2307-3713, ISSN: 2307-3721
Vol. 1 No. 2 April 2013

THE CHARACTERIZATION OF TEACHER COLLABORATION

Richard DuFour (2004) characterizes professional learning communities as groups of educators who "work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice in engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning" (p. 9). One characteristic that all thriving professional learning communities have in common, that is collaboration, which is helpful for professional learning- communities-creation. Research shows that collaboration between teachers can be a powerful tool for professional development and a driver for school improvement by providing "opportunities for adults across a school system to learn and think together about how to improve their practice in ways that lead to improved student achievement" (Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004, p. 2). Research indicates that teachers participating in professional development linked to school activities are more likely to improve their teaching (Parsad et al., 2001). Effective professional collaboration in schools focuses on improving practice in order to improve student learning. Teachers report that use of "one of several group processes available for the study of student work" promotes "ensuing discussions of the assignment, the link between the work and content standards, their expectations for student learning, and the use of scoring rubrics," leading to improved teaching and student learning (National Staff Development Council, 2001b). In order to attain collaboration, sharing is a critical component of teach communities (Hord, 1997; Leo & Cowan, 2000; Morrissey, 2000). A truly productive collaboration leads not only to individual reflection on instructional practice but also to conversation among collaborators about what they have learned. Also, it is a sign that teachers have moved to accept their own vulnerability as learners as well as teachers. As professionals develop a greater ease with sharing, it can grow from contributing insights during a classroom action research project to peer observation, consultation, or even peer instructional coaching. Structured professional collaboration that focuses on improved instruction benefits both teachers and students. School staff members who aspire to grow through professional learning communities can start by learning how to more effectively use the opportunities they have to work together. The following characteristics can be used to further describe teacher collaboration:

It is voluntary. Teachers may be required to work in close proximity, but they cannot be required to collaborate. They must make a personal choice to work collaboratively in such situations. Because collaboration is voluntary, not administratively mandated, teachers often form close, but informal, collaborative partnerships with colleagues.

It is based on parity. Teachers who collaborate must believe that all individuals' contributions are valued equally. The amount and nature of particular teachers' contributions may vary greatly, but the teachers recognize that what they offer is integral to the collaborative effort.

It requires a shared goal. Teachers collaborate only when they share a goal. If they are working on poorly defined goals, they may be unintentionally working on different goals. When this happens, miscommunication and frustration often occur instead of collaboration.

It includes shared responsibility for key decisions. Although teachers may divide their labor when engaged in collaborative activities, each one is an equal partner in making the fundamental decisions about the activities they are undertaking. This shared responsibility reinforces the sense of parity that exists among the teachers.

It includes shared accountability for outcomes. This characteristic follows directly from shared responsibility. That is, if teachers share key decisions, they must also share accountability for the results of their decisions, whether those results are positive or negative.

It is based on shared resources. Each teacher participating in a collaborative effort contributes some type of resource. This has the effect of increasing commitment and reinforcing each

professional's sense of parity. Resources may include time, expertise, space, equipment, or any other such assets.

It has emergent properties. Collaboration is based on belief in the value of shared decision making, trust, and respect among participants. However, while some degree of these elements is needed at the outset of collaborative activities, they do not have to be central characteristics of a new collaborative relationship. As teachers become more experienced with collaboration, their relationships will be characterized by the trust and respect that grow within successful collaborative relationships.

TEACHER COLLABORATION IN CURRENT SCHOOL PRACTICE

Recognizing the value of this activity, many schools have adapted their schedules to ensure that teachers and other professionals have time to collaborate through team meetings; critical groups; lesson study, in which teachers collaboratively plan, observe, and analyze classroom lessons; or other professional development. Many trends in schools are encouraging teacher collaboration. For example, peer coaching (Joyce & Showers, 1988) and interdisciplinary curriculum development (Brandt, 1991) are premised on teachers' collaborative relationships, as are current trends in the design and delivery of professional development programs (Barth, 1990). The trend toward school-based decision making is also consonant with the recognition that collaboration is becoming an essential ingredient in successful schools. Researchers Leo and Cowan (2000) and Hord (1997) identify shared vision and values focused on student learning. For example, if a school goal is to improve student problem-solving skills, collaboration time may be spent examining lessons and identifying problem-solving activities across various subject areas and grade levels. Smith and Scott (1990) have asserted that the collaborative school is easier to describe than define. Such a school, they suggest, is a composite of beliefs and practices characterized by the following elements:

The belief, based on effective schools research, that the quality of education is largely determined by what happens at the school site.

The conviction, also supported by research findings, that instruction is most effective in a school environment characterized by norms of collegiality and continuous improvement.

The belief that teachers are professionals who should be given the responsibility for the instructional process and held accountable for its outcomes.

The use of a wide range of practices and structures that enable administrators and teachers to work together on school improvement.

The involvement of teachers in decisions about school goals and the means for achieving them (p. 2).

Administrators often find that their discussions of collaboration focus on sharing authority with teachers and involving teachers in school decisions. While these are important aspects of school collaboration, it is teachers working together for the purpose of improving their teaching that distinguishes a truly collaborative school from a school that is simply managed in a democratic fashion. Little (1982) found that more effective schools could be differentiated from less effective schools by the degree of teacher collegiality, or collaboration they practiced. She observed that collegiality is the existence of four specific behaviors. First, teachers talk frequently, continuously, and concretely about the practice of teaching. Second, they observe others' teaching frequently and offer constructive feedback and critiques. Third, they work together to plan, design, evaluate, and prepare instructional materials and curriculum. Finally, they teach each other about the practice of teaching.

ISSN-L: 2307-3713, ISSN: 2307-3721
Vol. 1 No. 2 April 2013

Recognizing that collaboration refers to the professional working relationship among teachers establishes a fundamental understanding for leadership personnel who want to foster teacher collaboration.

THE APPROACHES FOR TEACHER COLLABORATION RELATE TO EDUCATION SERVICE DELIVERY

Teacher collaboration as it relates to education services should not be considered in isolation from other aspects of a collaborative school. With educational improvement for all students as the overriding goal of collaborative schools (Smith & Scott, 1990), teacher collaboration regarding students should be just another aspect of a school's collaborative ethic and an integral part of the school culture.

Applications of Collaborative Principles Collaboration cannot exist by itself. It can only occur when it is associated with some program or activity that is based on the shared goals of the individuals involved.

Depending upon their shared programmatic goals, educators can work together in many diverse ways to deliver services to students. Laycock, Gable, and Korinek (1991) have described several alternative formats or configurations that facilitate collaborative efforts to deliver educational services. The following sections consider applications of collaboration that may be used for improving the delivery of educational services to all students.

Co-Teaching

Co-teaching is becoming a viable approach for instruction in many school situations. For example, in some colleges, culture and English teachers are co-teaching classes that combine their subject matter into a course called American Studies. Similarly, in middle schools, teams of teachers are meeting regularly to discuss instructional issues and to monitor student progress. Many teachers, regardless of level, contact colleagues to engage in shared classroom activities either formally or informally.

This service delivery approach is also receiving increasing attention as a means of integrating students into general education classes. In co-teaching designed for this purpose, two teachers--one a general education teacher and the other a special education teacher--work primarily in a single classroom to deliver instruction to a heterogeneous group of students. Many different types of co-teaching may occur (Adams, Cessna, Stein, & Friend, 1992; Bauwens, Hourcade, & Friend, 1989; Friend & Cook, 1992). There are several common approaches in the school that we practiced:

Alternative Teaching

One teach, one observe or assist. In this type of co-teaching, both teachers are present, but one--often the general education teacher--takes a clear lead in the classroom while the other gathers observational data on students or "drifts" around the room assisting students during instruction. This approach is simple; it requires little planning on the part of the teachers, and it provides the additional assistance that can make a heterogeneous class successful. However, it also has serious liabilities. If the same teacher consistently observes or assists, that teacher may feel like a glorified aide and the students may have trouble responding to him or her as a real teacher. If this approach is followed, the teachers should alternate roles regularly.

Station Teaching

In this approach, the teachers divide the content to be delivered and each takes responsibility for part of it. In a classroom where station teaching is used, some of the students may be

completing independent work assignments or participating in peer tutoring. Although this approach requires that the teachers share responsibility for planning to sufficiently to divide the instructional content, each has separate responsibility for delivering instruction. Students benefit from the lower teacher-pupil ratio, and students may be integrated into a group instead of being singled out. Furthermore, because with this approach each teacher instructs each part of the class, the equal status of both students and teachers is maximized. One drawback to station teaching is that the noise and activity level may be unacceptable to some teachers.

Parallel Teaching

The primary purpose of this type of co-teaching is to lower the student-teacher ratio. In parallel teaching, the teachers plan the instruction jointly, but each delivers it to half of the class group. This approach requires that the teachers coordinate their efforts so that the students receive essentially the same instruction. This type of co-teaching is often appropriate for drill and practice activities, projects needing close teacher supervision, and test review. As with station teaching approaches, noise and activity levels may need to be monitored.

Team Teaching

The emphasis will be on two types in particular: pre-referral teams and multidisciplinary teams. Pre-referral team is a term used to refer to all the team approaches that address students' academic and behavior problems prior to any consideration for education eligibility. Some teams consist of only teachers, while some include others who can assist in assessing student difficulties and supporting teachers. On all such teams, the procedures used are generally consistent with those of the preferable intervention system proposed by Graden, Casey, and Bonstrom (1985):

Stage 1: Request for consultation. In this stage the teacher requests assistance for a student, sometimes through an informal contact with an individual who functions as a consultant and sometimes through presentation of student concerns at a team meeting.

Stage 2: Consultation. During this stage, strategies to address the problems raised by the student's teacher are suggested and systematically implemented. Generally, the teacher has the primary responsibility for most of the strategies.

Stage 3: Observation. Feedback on the strategies being implemented is sought to determine their effectiveness; alternative strategies may also be suggested. On some teams Stages 2 and 3 are combined.

Stage 4: Conference. At this stage, the team meets to consider the information gathered. The team may decide to continue or adapt interventions, determine that a full assessment is needed, or determine that no additional intervention is warranted.

If the team recommends referral for full assessment to determine eligibility for education, the team process is extended and involves a multidisciplinary team. In team teaching, both teachers share the instruction of students. The teachers may take turns leading a discussion, one may speak while the other demonstrates a concept, one may speak while the other models note taking on the chalkboard, and so on. Teachers may role play, simulate conflict, and model appropriate question asking. This approach requires the highest level of mutual trust and the most commitment. It is an approach that some co-teachers may never enjoy. On the other hand, many veteran co-teachers report that this is the type c of co- teaching they find most rewarding.

ISSN-L: 2307-3713, ISSN: 2307-3721
Vol. 1 No. 2 April 2013

SUGGESTIONS

Teachers should take the important points to keep in mind of all the approaches:

All members of the school community (i.e., teachers, administrators, parents) must understand that a co-taught class is not a duplication of effort or a waste of one teacher; the two teachers are accomplishing together what neither could do alone.

Co-teachers must be both flexible and committed to the co-teaching process. For co-teaching to be successful, each teacher gains a great deal.

Scheduling is one of the greatest challenges in co-teaching. Teachers not only need a shared time to teach (whether on a daily, weekly, or occasional basis), they also need time to plan instruction, especially for the models in which more coordination between the teachers is needed.

Care be taken so that individual classrooms have a manageable mix of students and that parents receive a full explanation of the goals and instructional approaches used in a co-taught class. That's to say, teachers should have the opportunity to learn about co-teaching options prior to beginning their own efforts.

Finally, schools designing co-teaching programs should systematically gather the information that will make the program accountable. School goals for student achievement should drive the work of professional learning communities. School leaders should focus the work of collaborative groups by helping them align their priorities with achievement goals as well as provide the resources needed to support their work. These priorities also should act as a filter for identifying additional professional development (Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004).

CONCLUSION

Collaboration is an exciting medium through which teachers can plan and carry out an array of services for students with disabilities as well as for other students. Establishing a strong collaborative ethic in a school has the additional benefit of enhancing teacher morale and providing teachers with a support network.

However, fostering collaboration requires patience and careful attention to many details. By managing it carefully, administrators can ensure that collaboration becomes foundation for their school communities.

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