

Fall 2014

The Effectiveness of the Critical Friends Model for Teacher Collaboration

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Running Head: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CRITICAL FRIENDS MODEL

The Effectiveness of the Critical Friends Model for Teacher Collaboration

Johanna Miller

Action Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of
Arts in Education

California State University, Monterey Bay
December 2014

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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CRITICAL FRIENDS MODEL

The Effectiveness of the Critical Friends Model for Teacher Collaboration

By Johanna Miller

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family for all of their support and encouragement. I would especially like to thank my mom for encouraging me and listening to me talk through my project. I couldn't have completed this project without your help. Thank you to Dr. Denti for acting as my advisor and supporter through the process.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CRITICAL FRIENDS MODEL

Abstract

This study analyzed teacher perceptions regarding the value of a modified version of the Critical Friends collaboration model. Fifteen teachers completed an anonymous survey regarding current collaboration practices. The results of the survey indicated that many teachers were unhappy with current methods of administrator lead collaboration and felt teachers should have flexibility and choice for topics of discussion during collaboration time. To research the efficacy of a structured collaboration model, a small focus group of four teachers participated used the Critical Friends Collaboration Model which included strict utilization protocols and norms. Using a modified version of the Critical Friends Consultancy Protocol, the group engaged in a structured discussion of a teacher-presented current classroom issue and then provided critical feedback to the presenter. The participating teachers provided feedback on the process after completing four half-hour sessions. While three of the four teachers found the structure to be more effective than current practices, consensus was not reached on how to disseminate and sustain the process within the school community.

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CHAPTER 1: STATEMENT OF PURPOSE, RATIONALE, AND OVERVIEW

Introduction

Collaboration is a word that has numerous meanings. Even the experts on the subject are not able to come to a consensus on a single definition. As a result, the concept is often misinterpreted. In the world of education, most teachers would define collaboration as teachers working together, whether it is lesson planning, analyzing student work, or sharing ideas and best practices. (Montell-Overall, 2005) Teachers work in collaborative teams to analyze data and numbers, without any guidance as to what to do with the data. Research-based collaborative models, when employed with fidelity, provide a foundation for teachers to solve problems and reflect on their practice. (Vescio et al, 2008) Collaboration also offers administrators an opportunity to engage with teachers as an equal participant discerning best or preferred practice to teach a diverse group of students found in schools today. Interestingly, collaboration has strong roots in the field of special education wherein special and general educators work together to provide opportunities for special needs students to engage with students in general education settings. In fact, co-teaching (special and general education teachers teaching together) is a model used in many schools to help students with special needs understand content and benefit from the expertise of both educators (Friend, Reising, Bauwins, 1993). Oftentimes educators subscribe to a collaborative model associated with their discipline. For instance, at the school site level general education teachers collaborate together in professional learning communities,

collaboration teams, grade level teams which may or may not include interventionists or special educators. Notwithstanding, special educators and teachers, working with ethnic and linguistic minorities, conduct their own meetings collaborating about issues related to their specialization. It is rare for a school to endorse a model that encompasses the best attributes of collaboration that includes all constituent parties in order to provide a common language and approach to serve all students in a meaningful way. The Critical Friends Collaboration Model is such a model and is based on creating a context for educators to come together irrespective of their disciplines to plan an educational approach to serve students from across the educational spectrum. Students at risk of school failure are considered as highly as advanced students when determining the best academic and social approach to learning.

The Critical Friends collaboration model is research-based with years of documentation to support its effectiveness. The key attributes of the model revolve around teachers solving problems associated with curriculum and instruction as well as social issues. The overall intent of this model is to provide an opportunity structure for all students to have equal access to the core curriculum. The model provides a context for dialogue whereby teachers look for ways to improve their teaching skills and improve student learning. It relies on a structured approach where teachers analyze their teaching methods as well as preconceived notions about who learns and what they can learn thus mitigating against pathologizing students or their parents.

Problem Statement

Professional development hours have long been a requirement for teachers in order to maintain their state certification. However, in recent years, there has been a shift away from logging professional development hours to school-based collaboration models such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). The notion behind this paradigm shift is that

teachers can improve student learning by collaborating, working together, and sharing best practices. There is consensus among the experts that teacher collaboration impacts and improves student learning. (Evans, 1996; Stoll et al, 2006; Vescio et al, 2008) In fact, there are well documented collaboration models indicating that the use of protocols with specific guidelines and norms is a key component to successful collaboration. However, there is a lack of clear understanding of the effectiveness of collaborative models and how to sustain them over time. Therefore, there continues to be a need to identify specific research-based methods that increase the likelihood that teachers will collaborate in a systematic manner so that the sharing of best practices will sustain over time.

Purpose of Study

While the research on collaboration emphasizes the benefits of working together and sharing best practices, there are still unanswered questions about how to create a sustainable model. Group dynamics often create challenges, as do ineffective guidelines. The main purpose of this study was to establish the Critical Friends collaboration model in a K-6 elementary school in Morgan Hill as a means to provide teacher support and improve student learning. A pilot study of four teachers across grade levels used a modified version of the CFM to gain an understanding of its effectiveness and usefulness. Specifically, the group used a modified version of the Consultancy Protocol.

Research Questions

For my action research project, I proposed the following questions:

- What considerations do teachers have in regards to implementing a modified version of CFM (tuning, consultancy, future protocols) at a school site?
- What are teachers' perceptions of the value and/or limitations of using a structured collaboration model?

Theoretical Model

The social constructivist theory best aligns with the concept of collaboration. Social constructivists, like John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky, and Jerome Bruner, looked at the learning process and how knowledge was constructed. Dewey (1938) believed that education was a social, interactive process where the teacher acted as a facilitator of learning. Through exploration, thinking, reflection, and interaction, a student would realize their full potential and become prepared for life in society. Vygotsky (1978) was a psychologist who theorized that social interaction led to self-awareness. He believed that learning was active and through the sharing of ideas, knowledge was built. His theory about the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) illustrated the learning range for tasks, from being able to complete a task on one's own to completing task with assistance to not being able to do at all. He theorized that optimal learning took place when tasks were completed with assistance. Bruner (1966) was also a psychologist who studied social interaction. He also theorized that learning was an active process where new ideas were constructed by making decisions or changes based on current and past knowledge. Although these theorists main aim was to analyze how students learn within an intense sociology like schools, these theories aptly applies to adults who also learn in the same manner. Educators

often are stumped on how best to educate students, which in itself creates anxiety and ineffectiveness. Collaborating together, however, allows educators to discuss problems and with assistance solve problems that may be plaguing them. In essence, they to, like students profit from entering into the Zone of Proximal Development where they can actively solve problems together thus reducing the difficulty and complexity of the task/problem/issue. As for Dewey, education is a social environment, where everyone learns and grows by interacting with one another and there is none better way than when teachers collaborate and learn from one another.

Researcher Background

I have a BA degree in Social Science from San Jose State University. I received my teaching credential from National University and completed my two year BTSA Induction training at Evergreen Elementary School District and Morgan Hill Unified School District. I have eight years of experience as a teacher. I served as EL Coordinator for three years, administering CELDT testing and tracking the progress of English learners. I also served as SST Coordinator (Student Study Team) for the last two years, which entailed facilitating meetings between parents, administration, teachers, and special education. I am currently the GATE Coordinator in charge of after-school enrichment activities.

Definition of Terms

- **Collaboration:** to work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavor.
 - A trusting, working relationship between two or more equal participants involved in shared thinking, shared planning, and shared creation of integrated instruction.
- (Montell-Overall, 2005, p. 5)

- **Professional Learning Communities (PLCs):** an extended learning opportunity to foster collaborative learning among colleagues within a particular work environment or field. It is often used in schools as a way to organize teachers into working groups.
- **Professional Development:** the advancement of skills or expertise to succeed in a particular profession, especially through continued education.
- **Professional Development School (PDS):** provides a supportive, yet rigorous structure with attention centered on research-based models and systems. (Doolittle et al., 2008 , p. 309)
- **Critical Friends Groups (CFGs):** a job-embedded form of professional development focused on learning in community through the collaborative examination of student work and teacher practice. (Key, 2006, p. 1)
- **Sustained:** to keep up or keep going, as an action or process.
- **Group Dynamics:** ways in which a group of individuals interact and respond to one another.
- **Protocols:** the customs and regulations dealing with diplomatic formality, precedence, and etiquette.

Summary

Chapter one provided an overview of the purpose and problem as it relates to my study on the effectiveness of the Critical Friends Collaboration Model. The following chapter will explore the research on the topic of collaboration.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction:

There has been a paradigm shift from professional development to collaboration in response to national reform. (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008) Collaboration can be a powerful tool for improving student learning and teaching practices. This paper looks at what is collaboration and what are the characteristics of effective methods needed to make it successful. It also discusses PLCs, professional learning communities, and PDSs, professional development schools. Two models of reflection protocols lay out specific practices that can be used to improve student and teacher achievement. The limitations or cons to collaboration are also stated.

What is collaboration?

Merriam-Webster defines collaboration as, “to work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavor.” (www.merriam-webster.com) The theory is that teachers can improve student learning by collaborating and sharing best practices. In a study conducted in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, heart surgeons agreed to regularly communicate and share experiences and expertise for nine-months. The study found that the death rate among patients decreased by 25 percent. (Cushman, 1996) Similar results could be achieved by teachers who emphasis teamwork rather than individual planning. In order to meet the needs of a changing world, teachers and the school community must work together to improve student learning.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) is a term used to define collaboration groups. The concept was based off of a concept from the business arena and modified to the needs of education. In a PLC, teachers are expected to not only teach but to learn as well. (Vescio, 2008) However, according to research done by Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas (2006), there was no universal definition for PLCs. They claimed that student progress depended on building the capacity of teachers and the school climate: a combination of motivation, skill, positive learning, organizational conditions and culture, and infrastructure support.

National Survey

In 1997, Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon (1998) conducted a national study that evaluated the federally funded Eisenhower Professional Development Program and its professional development activities. The study sorted through 1027 teacher surveys from 358 school districts and was based on professional development activities from July 1- December 31, 1997. The probability sample focused mainly on math and science teachers and asked them to report on behaviors, not attitudes toward the activities.

Based on the analyzed surveys, the authors theorized that “sustained and intensive” professional development was more successful than short-term. Academic focused activities were more “hands on” and deemed more useful as well as prompted longer lasting results. The data also looked at collaboration. This part of the survey focused on the ways teachers work together and draw on one another’s expertise. The results noted that this approach led to a change in teaching. Teachers could discuss, plan, and practice through lesson planning, observing expert teaching, and reviewing student work. As a result, teachers discovered they could better diagnose and recognize student problems.

Planning and Processes

According to Stoll et al. (2006), there were four main processes to create and develop professional learning communities. The first was “focusing on learning processes”. It was not enough to have time for collaboration but to also have opportunities to enhance knowledge. An emphasis on professionalism was also essential. The second was “making the best of human and social resources”. PLC’s would be difficult to construct and maintain without solid leadership and a positive, learner-centered school culture. Stoll et al. also claimed that leadership should be distributed, and was not the job of an individual. Another important factor was a positive and trusting environment. Without which, collaboration would be impossible. The third process was “managing structural resources”. These included time and space or location. The final process was “interacting with and drawing on external agents”. This included parents, other support staff, and outside agencies as well.

Characteristics of Effective Collaboration

According to Stoll et al., there were five characteristics that made collaboration effective: shared values and vision, collective responsibility, reflective professional inquiry, collaboration, and group, as well as individual, learning being promoted.

Shared vision and values

Doolittle, Sudeck, & Rattigan (2008) claimed that Professional Development School (PDS) partnerships were integral to successful professional learning communities because they established a framework for implementation. In order to be effective, PDSs needed to agree on student outcomes and a common purpose. A problem solving approach was one way to pursue common goals. (Butler, Lauscher, Jarvis-Selinger, & Beckingham, 2004)

Butler et al.(2004) recommended establishing a “communities of practice” or COP framework. “...a COP perspective foregrounds the influence of history, society, and community in shaping teacher learning. Individuals do not construct knowledge in a vacuum, their construction of knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and skill are socially and culturally constructed.” (Butler et al., 2004, p. 438)

Collective responsibility

It is the collective responsibility of all members of the school staff to ensure effective collaboration. Wood (2007) claimed that the quality of a student’s education depended on the quality of the teacher. Butler et al. (2004) theorized that there were benefits for individuals who were given the opportunity to share their expertise and work towards a common goal. Peer pressure and personal accountability helped ease isolation and sustain commitment. (Stoll et al., 2006)

Reflective professional inquiry

The SCL approach, “strategic content learning”, helped students, as well as teachers, self-reflect on their learning. (Butler et al., 2004) “Specifically, the teachers’ goal was to learn how to engage students in interactive discussions that helped them learn how to reflectively guide their own (learning) activities based on a clear view of (task) goals, and to critically monitor outcomes so as to re/co-construct knowledge about effective (learning) processes.” (Butler, 2004, p. 440)

Stoll et al. (2006) stated that reflective professional inquiry included not only self-examining practices but also engaging in discussions about educational issues or other problems so that new knowledge can be applied.

Collaboration

Collaboration required staff involvement and interdependence. (Stoll et al., 2006) It emphasized the “importance of nurturing learning communities”, where teachers can try new ideas and discuss effective teaching practices. (Butler et al., 2004)

Group and individual learning

Ongoing professional learning promoted effective results. This included the individual teacher as well as the collective group.

Reflection on Teacher and Student Work

Reflection required teachers to think about their own practices and procedures as well as student expectations. (Vescio et al., 2008) The thought process needed to shift from teaching to learning. By using protocols, teachers analyzed student work as a means to improve their teaching practices and improve student learning. (Cushman, 1996) Cushman identified two protocols for reflecting on student work: the Tuning Protocol and the California Protocol. Each protocol had specific guidelines and norms for all participants.

The Tuning Protocol

The Tuning Protocol is a method for closely examining and analyzing student work. The process takes about 75 minutes. The protocol is detailed below:

- Introduction (10 minutes)-Introduce protocols and norms.
- Teacher Presentation (20 minutes)-The teacher presents samples of student work. He or she outlines the problem and the desired outcomes. This time belongs to the teacher and is uninterrupted.
- Clarifying Questions (5 minutes)-These are quick, easy to answer questions to help ensure the problem is understood.

- Warm and cool feedback (15 minutes)-The group discusses the presented problem. The presenting teacher remains silent.
- Reflection/Purpose (15 minutes)-Teacher reflects on comments.
- Debrief (10 minutes)-Discuss reactions.

The California Protocol

The California Protocol is a method for looking at larger school issues. Instead of looking at student work, the team discusses an essential question. The protocol is outlined below:

- Introduction (5 minutes)-Review purpose and guidelines.
- Essential question-focus (5 minutes)
- Clarifying questions (5 minutes)
- Team gives analysis (25 minutes)
- Clarifying questions (5 minutes)
- Reflectors- groups of 4-6- provide feedback (15 minutes)-Chart warm, cool, and hard feedback. Analysis team- observe and listen to feedback
- Reflectors- each group shares 1-2 supportive statements (5 minutes)
- Team Reflection and Planning
 - Analysis team- reflect, plan, discuss with one another
- Dialogue
 - Both teams have an open dialogue together (10 minutes)
- Debrief and Closure
 - Moderator facilitates debriefing (10 minutes)

The Critical Friends Collaboration Model

The Critical Friends Collaboration Model (CFM) was created by Brown University's Annenberg Institute in 1994. The Annenberg Institute is a "national policy-research and reform support organization that promotes quality education for all children, especially in urban communities." (<http://annenberginstitute.org>) The CFM was created as educational reform, designed to improve professional development and create a collaborative school culture.

The CFM has had resurgence in recent years thanks to the professional development shift to collaboration. The National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) is the training facility for Critical Friends Groups (CFG). It defines CFGs as a “professional learning community consisting of approximately 8-12 educators who come together voluntarily at least once a month for about 2 hours.” (<http://nsrfharmony.org>) The CFGs develop shared norms and follow strict protocols. The NSRF outlines three protocols: the Consultancy Protocol, the Tuning Protocol, and the Future Protocol.

The Consultancy Protocol attempts to solve a school or classroom dilemma. “A Consultancy is a structured process for helping an individual, or a team, think more expansively about a particular, concrete dilemma.” (<http://nsrfharmony.org>) Outside perspective is critical to the success of the protocol. A Consultancy group meets for about 50 minutes to develop solutions to a presented dilemma. The protocol is outlined below:

- The presenter presents a dilemma to the group and proposes an essential question. (5-10 min.)
- Clarifying questions (5 min.)
- Probing questions (10 min.)
- Group discussion of dilemma. (15 min.)

The Tuning Protocol is a method to “fine-tune” a classroom assignment, assessment, or project. The protocol allows teachers to reflect on their practices and gain insight from colleagues. The protocol is outlined below:

- Introduction (5 min.)
- Presentation (15 min.)- The presenter shares student work with the group and asks a focusing question.
- Clarifying questions (5 min.)
- Examination of student work samples (15 min.)
- Pause to reflect on warm and cool feedback (2-3 min.)

- Warm and cool feedback (15 min.)
- Reflection (5 min.)
- Debrief (5 min.)

The Future Protocol is an approach to backward planning. It allows an educator to expand on an idea while collaborating with colleagues and sharing best practices. The Future Protocol is different from other protocols. Once the presenter has presented the idea to the group, the presenter leaves while the group works through the idea to formulate a plan. The presenter rejoins the group to debrief the proposed plan.

In 2006, Key (2006) reviewed the research on the impact of Critical Friends Groups. Key's findings revealed four claims about CFGs: "foster a culture of community and collaboration", "enhance teacher professionalism", "have the potential to change teachers' thinking and practice", and "have the potential impact student learning". (Key, 2006, 1)

Limitations

Resistance was the inherent reaction to change. (Evans, 1996) Staff reluctance depended on the individual's attitudes. "Overlooking and underestimating the human and organizational components of change has routinely sabotaged programs to improve our schools (and, for that matter, programs to improve our corporations and government agencies, as well.) If we have learned nothing else from these efforts, it should be this: no innovation can succeed unless it attends to the realities of people and place." (Evans, 1996)

Clear norms and procedures were essential to successful collaboration. A vague understanding of desired outcomes, procedures, and expectations led to "ambiguous work" and challenging experiences. (Dooner et al., 2008) As a result, sustaining meaningful collaboration created a challenge with no clear solution.

Conclusion

Collaboration can be a powerful tool for improving student learning if it is well thought out and planned. Schools and teachers need to have clearly expressed norms and expectations. Teacher buy-in and participation is essential. It is more beneficial to communicate and work together than to try to work alone.

While most people would agree that collaboration improves teaching practices, it is still difficult to sustain. Participants come with their own biases and expectations, and without full support of a staff, collaboration can be a laborious project. The research has no easy solutions to this problem. Establishing a method requires forethought about potential issues and extensive planning.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this section I will describe the methods that I will use to gather information about the research questions I proposed:

- What considerations do teachers have in regards to implementing a modified version of the Critical Friends collaboration model (tuning, consultancy, future protocols) at a school site?
- What are teachers' perceptions of the value and/or limitations of using a structured collaboration model?

Overall Research Design

I used a proactive action research design. The proactive action research design allows teachers to try a new practice and later, fine-tune it based on reflection of the effectiveness of the process (Schmuck, 2006). The emphasis for the focus group was Cooperative Action Research. This method highlighted positive social support, an understanding of a critical friendship, and included probing conversations. These three attributes were integral components to the Critical Friends Collaboration Model.

The research questions were addressed using survey data. Survey responses were collected through quantitative and qualitative (open-ended) questions. The questions focused on teacher perceptions of current collaboration practices and their insights on how to improve it. The responses were analyzed and the data frequency was imputed into graphs.

Setting

The setting of my study is “Main Street Elementary School” in the South Bay region of California. The following information is taken from the city and district websites, as well as the websites for the U.S. Census and www.city-data.com.

Community: According to the U.S. Census (2012), the population of “South Bay City” is about 39,420 residents. The demographics are roughly 65.2% white alone, 34% Hispanic/Latino, 2% Black/African American alone, 10.2% Asian alone, .3% Pacific Islander alone, 15.75% other race alone. The city website states that of the 34% of people who identify themselves as Hispanic/Latino, 82.04% are Mexican. 28.6% of residents are under the age of 18 with 66.4% of households being family households (www.city-data.com). The median household income is about \$94,510. The median age is 36.6 years old.

School: The school where the research will be conducted is one of seven elementary schools (K-6) in the district. The district also consists of one elementary/middle school (K-8), two middle schools (7-8), two high schools (9-12), one continuation high school (10-12) and one adult community school. About 23% of students in the district are English Language Learners (ELLs) from a variety of ethnic backgrounds (Mexican to Dutch to Swedish to Haitian to Chinese), and 11% of students receive special education services. “Main Street Elementary” serves over 500 students with 28 certificated teachers on staff. There is an average of three teachers per grade level. Three teachers have taught for less than three years, while two teachers have been in education for over 30 years. There are four male teachers on staff. One teacher is of Hispanic/Latino descent, while the majority of teachers are European American.

Participants

The collaboration survey was made available to all teaching staff at my elementary school. There are 28 teachers ranging in grade levels from kindergarten to 6th grade. It was an anonymous survey. As a result, I don’t know which fifteen teachers participated.

My research project with the focus group was based on a voluntary convenience sample of teachers in my school, as follows.

- Teacher A is a kindergarten teacher who has also taught 1st and 2nd grade. She has been teaching in the district for more than 15 years.
- Teacher B is a 4th grade teacher who started her career in the computer industry.
- Teacher C is a 3rd grade teacher who started as a substitute and has been teaching in her own classroom for the last 3 years.

- Teacher D is a long time veteran to the district. She is currently a 4th grade teacher but has held numerous other job titles throughout the district.

The four teachers participated in a small, heterogeneous collaboration group that followed a modified set protocols outlined in the Critical Friends Groups collaboration model. I distributed a survey to all four teachers after implementation as a method to interpret teacher attitudes about the collaboration process. It included both open-ended and selected response questions.

Facilitator: I will serve as evaluator and facilitator of the Critical Friends Group Collaboration Model. I am female teacher with 10 years of experience. I have taught kindergarten, 1st, 4th, and 6th grades.

Data Collection Procedures

Intervention

The intervention consisted of implementing a modified version of the Critical Friends collaboration model in my elementary school. The model is designed to create a professional learning community where teachers work collaboratively to analyze student work or solve a problem. (www.nsrharmony.org) Four, half-hour CFG sessions were held.

Implementation

A survey (see Appendix B) on current collaboration practices was made accessible to all teachers. The survey was anonymous and responses were collected online using SurveyMonkey. (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/>)

Prior to implementation, a PowerPoint presentation (see Appendix A) on the Critical Friends collaboration model was administered to all teachers interested in participating in the

focus group. They learned how to implement the program, the research it was based on, as well as observe and reflect on a mock demonstration of the protocols.

Four teacher volunteers participated in a Critical Friends Group for a half-hour long session, using a “modified” Consultancy Protocol. Four sessions were administered. Each teacher had an opportunity to present a dilemma.

The “Modified” Consultancy Protocol

- Presenter presents the dilemma (5 min.)
- The group asks clarifying questions. (5 min.)
- The group asks probing questions (5 min.)
- Group discusses the dilemma. (10 min.)
- Debrief the process. (5 min.)

After the fourth session, teachers participated in a group discussion debriefing the process. A modified version of the collaboration survey (see Appendix B) was collected and analyzed to assess the perceived effectiveness of the Critical Friends Collaboration Model.

Data Collection and Sources

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected in the form of a survey. The survey was created by me and distributed online through the use of SurveyMonkey.

Quantitative Data

In the survey, five of the ten questions were close-ended. They probed teachers about their perceptions of current collaboration practices. SurveyMonkey analyzed the quantitative data and created graphs.

Qualitative Data

In the survey, there were five open-ended survey questions. They asked teachers to elaborate on the perceived effectiveness of current collaboration practices, as well as what factors would make collaboration time more effective. The responses were analyzed and coded for themes.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data

I used an online site (surveymonkey.com) to distribute and analyze my questions. I used graphs created by SurveyMonkey to display my findings.

Qualitative Data

I read and reread all responses and coded them, initially using codes created from my research questions. I continually reviewed and revised my codes as needed, and searched for patterns in the coding that might yield themes. I analyzed emerging patterns and/or themes and triangulated them with participants' interview responses to yield final themes that helped answer my research questions.

After the data I collected has been analyzed, I created a PowerPoint presentation and plan to present my findings to the school staff during a staff meeting. It will cover my findings in regards to program implementation and teacher attitudes toward the CFG.

Limitations/Threats to Validity

Two major limitations presented themselves throughout the process: time and teacher reluctance.

Trying to coordinate and schedule time with four other individuals proved to be a challenge. Teachers have numerous commitments and free time is difficult to synchronize. This would

make sustainability difficult. One way to overcome this challenge in the future is to schedule CFGs during mandated school collaboration time.

Teachers were reluctant to participate. Only four teachers were willing to participate in the focus group. Morale at my school is at an all-time low. Our district implemented new curriculum in both math and language arts this year and many teachers are feeling overwhelmed. Teacher personnel incidents and issues were another contributing factor. Teacher participation is an essential component.

Potential threats to validity were time frame and quality of survey questions. Four CFG sessions may not be enough time for teachers to perceive results. A longer time frame would help determine the sustainability of the collaboration model. The survey questions could have been more focused.

Summary

This chapter detailed what my study was, where it took place, and how it was implemented. I was able to analyze perceptions of current collaboration practices and the perceived effectiveness of the Critical Friends Collaboration Model. The next chapter will detail these findings.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

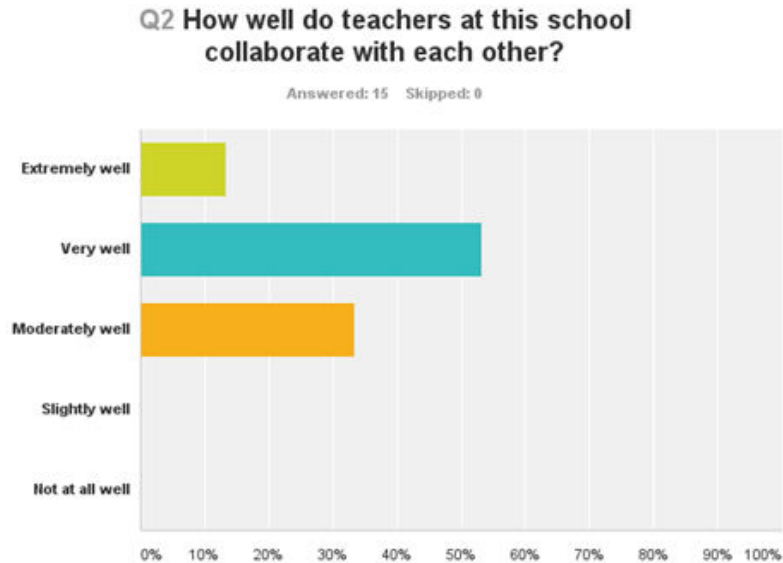
The results of my practical action research study are presented in this chapter, which focused on the following research questions: 1). What considerations do teachers have in regards to implementing a modified version of the Critical Friends Collaboration Model at a school site? 2). What are teachers' perceptions of the value and/or limitations of using a structured collaboration model?

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected using surveys, observations, and a reflective journal. The following themes arose: need for cross-grade level collaborations, intervention and support for students below grade level, flexibility to choose collaboration topics, and some structure to collaboration meeting.

Collaboration Survey

Fifteen teachers completed the on-line survey on current collaboration practices. Their responses gave insight on how to proceed with the focus group. There was a consensus on the definition of collaboration. Common vocabulary such as "sharing best practices" and "working with colleagues" were evident in almost every response. Participant 5 summed it up best. Collaboration is "generously sharing best practices, resources, and novel approaches in an atmosphere of mutual respect and appreciation." (see Appendix C for a full list of responses.)

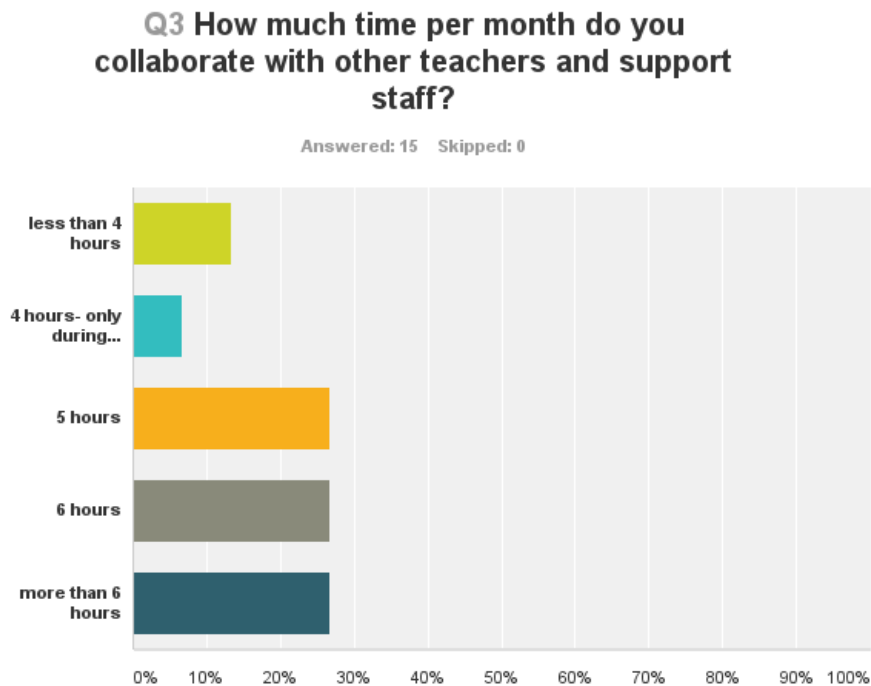
Figure 1: How Well Teachers Collaborate



Fifteen out of fifteen teachers (100%) felt they collaborated at least moderately well together. Eight teachers believed they collaborated very well together, while two categorized themselves as collaborating extremely well.

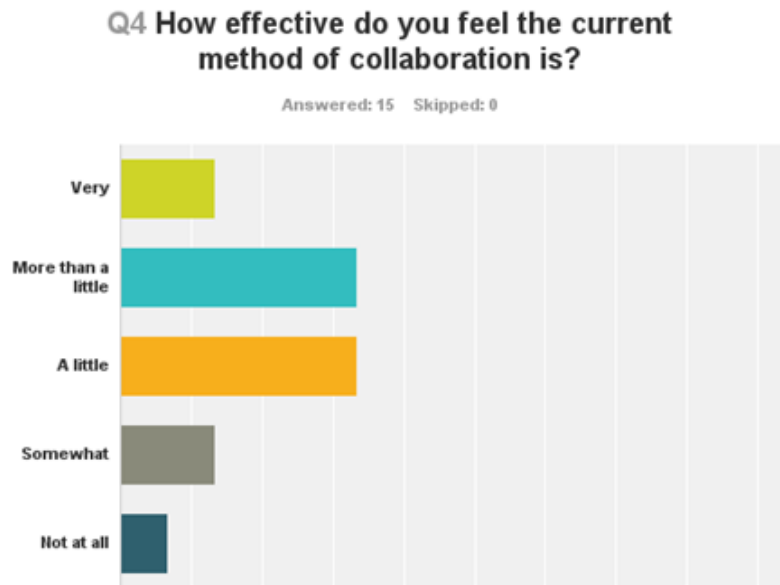
When asked to elaborate on their response, Teacher 1, who responded with “very well”, stated, “We all freely share ideas and exchange materials that supplement subjects. Help and support is also given generously.” Teacher 10, who also responded “very well”, claimed, “The majority of the teachers at this school collaborate weekly, if not daily.”

Figure 2: Amount of Time Spent Collaborating



Eight out of fifteen teachers spent more than six hours a month collaborating, with four of those spending more than six hours. Four teachers spent about five hours a month, which is one hour more than mandated district collaboration time. One teacher only collaborated during the imbedded collaboration time. Interestingly, two teachers collaborated with other teachers and support staff less than four hours a month, which is less than the imbedded collaboration time.

Figure 3: Effectiveness of Current Collaboration Practices

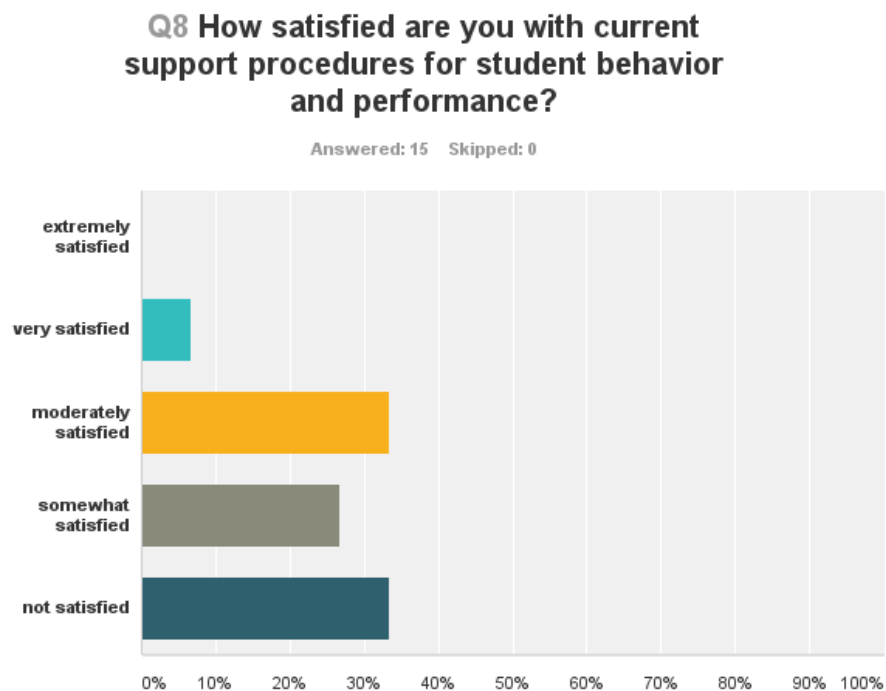


Two out of fifteen teachers felt the current method of collaboration was “very” effective. Five claimed it was “more than a little” effective. Five responded with “a little” effective. Two said “somewhat”, while one teacher felt the current collaboration method wasn’t effective at all.

The following survey question asked teachers what they felt would make collaboration time more effective. Teacher 1 felt collaboration time should be respected and “...not eaten up with principal/school issues.” Several teachers did not like sharing out at the end of a session and also referenced a need for direction or an agenda. According to Teacher 3, “I think everyone in the team needs to be on the same page. If they’re not, then it makes it difficult to discuss student progress and solutions.”

Another common theme was flexibility to use the time as needed by the grade level. Teacher 13 wanted, “more flexibility. We aren’t allowed to use the time for prep, but prepping together brings up conversations that lead to specific ideas on implementation that result in collaboration and consistency.” Teacher 14 mirrored the previous sentiment.

Figure 4: Satisfaction with Current Intervention Support



No one was “extremely satisfied” with the current support procedures. One out of fifteen classified themselves as “very satisfied”. Five teachers were “moderately satisfied”. Four felt they were “somewhat satisfied”, while five teachers were “not satisfied” with current support procedures for student behavior and performance.

Teacher 3 was “not satisfied” with the current support procedures. “There needs to be more support in terms of students that are below the grade level expectation. Reading support,

pull out, push in, anything to help those that are struggling to meet the standards.” Teacher 9 felt, “It is very difficult to move a student through the SST (student study team) process to be identified for services and support. There is also limited support options to no support for those students who do not qualify.” Those who were not satisfied also cited a need for leadership and frustration with inconsistent policies.

Table 1: Common Themes from Open-Ended Survey Questions

Common definition of collaboration: Working with colleagues Sharing ideas/ best practices	X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X
Value in cross grade level collaboration (Especially 1 grade above and 1 grade below)	X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X
Should collaboration time be structured? YES NO Sometimes	X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X
Need for leadership	X X
Flexibility to choose collaboration topics	X X X X X X X X X X

All teachers found value in cross grade level collaboration. Several teachers cited a need to have curriculum conversations with the grade level above and the grade below. Teacher 1 stated, “I think there is a lot of value to know what the classes below you are studying and what the grade above you will be expecting.” According to Teacher 13, “Cross grade level collaboration allows a more complete picture of both expectations and background. This leads to more school-wide consistency.” Another perceived benefit to cross grade collaboration was the avoidance of duplication of projects and field trips.

Several teachers felt collaboration time should be structured. According to Teacher 4, “If it is not structured, people will take advantage and not participate.” Three teachers felt it should not be structured. Teacher 7 claimed, “I think teachers need to collaborate on their own pressing

matters for their grade level.” However, the majority of teachers believed collaboration time should be flexible. Teacher 8 felt, “I think that some structure is necessary, but too much structure is like scripted lessons- ineffective.” According to Teacher 9, “It should be somewhat structured with time set aside to collaborate but freedom within that time to let ideas and opinions flow.”

Another common theme was a need for flexibility during collaboration time. Teachers wanted to ability to choose their topics for grade level discussions. According to Teacher 5, “I think collaboration should be as flexible as possible...we need to be able to address challenges as they come up...” Teacher 14 concurred by stating, “On some levels it would be helpful to have an idea or topic that could be discussed/developed, but we also need those times for developing our own ideas based on the needs of the teachers and grade levels.”

Focus Group

Four teachers became part of a Critical Friend Group. They followed a modified version of the Consultancy Protocol. I served as the facilitator, ensuring the protocol was followed within the allotted time. The group met for four half-hour sessions.

Session 1: Teacher D discussed an upper grade student who was very recently diagnosed as autistic. Since his official diagnosis, the student has regressed. He displays passive resistive tendencies and has shut down. He is not reading and has difficulty communicating his ideas. He has an IEP and receives special education services for speech, occupational therapy, and resource. Teacher D posed the following question: What can I do about missing work during lessons where he is pulled out for services? What should my focus be? The group asked the following clarifying questions with responses from the teacher:

Q: What subjects does he miss?

R: Spelling and reading.

Q: What accommodations have you made?

R: Teacher fills out student's agenda (homework planner) and provides copies of notes taken during class. He sits in the front of the class but often turns his body away from the teacher. He struggles with writing.

During the group's discussion, several key points and suggestions were made. The subjects the student misses are the same subjects being addressed with the resource teacher. One suggestion was to create a simple behavior chart, broken into three sections, to note when the student was off task. This could be an interactive tool as well as assist the teacher in determining a pattern of behavior. Photo cards to help initiate a conversation were another suggestion. Videos or CDs of the textbook could be a tool to help the student grasp the missing classroom curriculum. Suggestions for writing were using a speech-to-text computer program or have the parent write the student's response.

Teacher D found several suggestions to try. She also determined she would work closely with the resource teacher in order to provide the proper support for the student.

Session 2: Teacher A brought a sensitive subject to discuss with the group. She has a lower grade student from the Middle East who is a compulsive storyteller. The student has a habit of inappropriately touching herself. The teacher was looking for guidance on what to do next. The group asked the following question:

Q: Have you brought this issue to the parent's attention?

A: Not yet. I would like support in how to handle the conversation. Should I have the conversation with the parents?

The group discussed the problem. Several suggestions were proposed. The teacher could teach a lesson on germs. Non-verbal cues could be established to redirect the focus.

Observation by the school psychologist should be a priority.

During the debriefing, Teacher A determined her first step would be to talk with the school psychologist the next day. From there, a plan on how best to handle the situation can be established.

Session 3: Teacher C discussed a lower grade student who exhibits self-deprecating behavior. He bangs his head on the table or hits his head with his hand when he makes a mistake. He is easily frustrated and impulsive. There is no parent involvement or support. He is the youngest of four boys and is the family's least concern. He is academically capable but has a chaotic home life. The teacher posed the following question: What can I do to stop him from hitting himself? The following clarifying questions were asked:

Q: Have you talked to the parents about his behavior?

A: The dad doesn't see anything wrong. The mom gets out of jail in December.

Q: What do you do when he hits his head with his fist?

A: I tell him to stop, that it's dangerous to hit our head.

Q: Has he been referred to counseling?

A: Yes, but the family refuses to sign the permission slip.

The group discussed the dilemma posed by Teacher C. Some suggestions were to check with the school psychologist for possible relaxation techniques. The student could be taught some

breathing exercises to help self-regulate his frustration. Common, familiar verbiage could be used. A designated “chill out” area could provide the student with a quiet place to de-stress.

Session 4: In the fourth session, Teacher B discussed an upper grade student. The student is academically capable but exhibits “sneaky” behavior. The teacher suspected that he has sent her inappropriate emails, however it couldn’t be proven. The teacher also feels that he suffers from low self-esteem and doesn’t comprehend natural consequences. The parents are supportive of the teacher and are willing to follow through with consequences at home. The question posed was: How can I prevent the student’s mischievous behavior in the classroom?

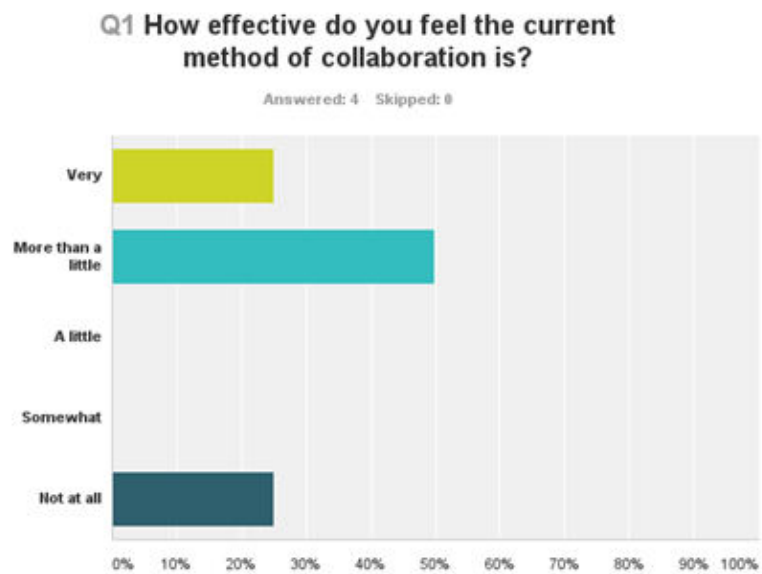
The group discussed the dilemma. One teacher suggested getting to know the student better. She suggested the 2/10 strategy where you give the student two minutes a day for 10 days to talk about anything they want. Another suggestion was to call the student by his last name when the teacher meant business. (Mr. “last name”) A job, or sense of purpose, could help elevate the student’s self-esteem and sense of worth. However, the group consensus was to maintain communication from the parents and attempt to attack the problem as a team. One teacher also felt it was important to accentuate the positive with not only the student but the parents as well.

Group Reflection: The group met for one more session to reflect on the Critical Friends Group. Teacher B felt the structured collaboration model was “more helpful than the district collaboration”. When posed with the prospect of maintaining the CFG, the group saw the benefits of continued collaboration. A possibility was meeting once a month during mandated collaboration time. The group also felt having special education support staff available during the collaboration would strengthen the process.

Focus group survey

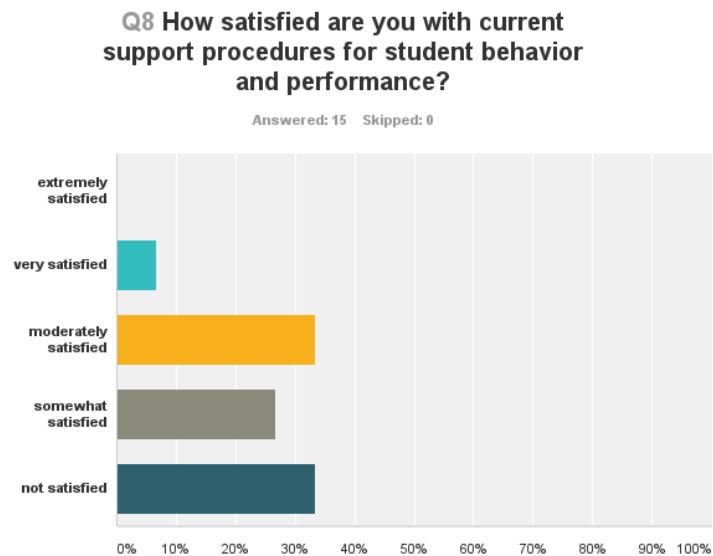
The group completed a modified version of the collaboration survey after participating in the CFG. There were only five questions and participants were instructed to answer in accordance with participating in the Critical Friends Group.

Figure 5: Effectiveness of the Critical Friends Collaboration Model



After the intervention, three out of four teachers found the Critical Friends Collaboration Model more than a little effective. One teacher felt the CFG was “very” effective. Two teachers believed the model was “more than a little” effective. While one teacher claimed the method was “not at all” effective.

Figure 6: Satisfaction with Current Support Procedures



One teacher was “extremely satisfied” with the intervention. Teacher C stated, “Other than it taking our time...I thought it was very effective.” Teacher A felt, “There isn't much (Intervention) and SST is a tedious, lengthy process. We need to have time to bring up concerns and brainstorm ideas. It would be awesome to have [the school psychologist] in attendance.”

When asked “What would make collaboration time more effective?”, cross grade level discussions were a common response. Teacher A stated, “Cross grade level time dedicated to cc (Common Core) subjects.” Teacher C responded with, “I like how a small group (5-6) teachers that were motivated got together to discuss solutions. I felt we made some progress in a short amount of time. Left me feeling we had more options/impact than before.”

The group consensus was that teachers should still have the flexibility to choose discussion topics, even within a structured model. According to Teacher C, “(Collaboration) should focus on what we need, not what the district wants from us.”

Summary

Looking back at my research questions, my findings answered both of my questions.

My first research question was: What considerations do teachers have in regards to implementing a modified version of the Critical Friends Collaboration Model (consultancy protocol) at a school site? In the focus group, the model provided an opportunity to provide teachers with critical feedback and offer manageable suggestions. The teachers were dedicated to trying the process and maintained a positive outlook. There was a feeling of mutual respect and everyone's ideas were valued. By being a cross grade level group, teachers received suggestions from a variety of backgrounds and experiences.

My second research was: What are teachers' perceptions of the value and/or limitations of using a structured collaboration model? Most teachers were open to structure as long as there was flexibility. Structured collaboration should support what the teachers need and not be dictated by administration. Teachers wanted flexibility to address challenges as they arose and not be tied to a given topic. Structured collaboration also would help promote consistency among grade levels.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter provides a discussion of my overall study by addressing my two research questions: 1. What considerations do teachers have in regards to implementing a modified version of the Critical Friends Collaboration Model (consultancy protocol) at a school site? 2. What are teachers' perceptions of the value and/or limitations of using a structured collaboration model?

I will summarize my study and offer my personal thoughts on my findings. I will also discuss what my next steps are to continue my study.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceived effectiveness of using a structured collaboration model. Additionally, it determined what considerations were needed in regards to implementing a modified version of the Critical Friends Collaboration Model.

The literature detailed the benefits of teacher collaboration. Collaboration potentially improves student learning and teacher effectiveness. However, there was no clear consensus on the best

methods for collaborating. I wanted to determine if a structured collaboration model would meet the specific needs of my school.

I gave all teachers access to an on-line, anonymous survey on perceptions of current collaboration practices. Fifteen out of twenty-eight teachers responded and offered insight on the effectiveness of current practices as well as suggestions for future improvement. Of the fifteen teachers, four agreed to participate in a focus group piloting a modified version of the Critical Friends Collaboration Model. Four, half-hour sessions were executed. After the sessions were completed, there was a group discussion about their thoughts of the process. They also completed a modified survey in regards to the intervention.

Findings Restated

All teachers, that completed the survey, felt that they collaborated well with their colleagues. However, many didn't collaborate outside of district collaboration time. Many found value in cross grade level collaboration in order to know what other grade levels expect. Teachers were also open to structured collaboration time as long as there was flexibility to choose discussion topics. The consensus was teachers should decide what their needs were, not administration.

The focus group found value in the Critical Friends Collaboration Model and would be willing to continue to meet and discuss classroom issues. They also felt it would be helpful to have special education teachers available to provide additional insight. They appreciated the opportunity to discuss student issues in a safe, respectful environment.

Personal thoughts of findings

Due to low teacher morale at my school site, my sample size was smaller than anticipated. I had hoped to have at least twenty teacher surveys and seven focus group volunteers. The survey did offer me insight as to the concerns of my colleagues in regards to collaboration and ways to make better use of collaboration time.

The focus group survey cited one teacher who didn't feel the CFG was beneficial at all. Upon looking at the teacher's other responses, it is possible the special instructions for the survey were not read. The focus group was asked to complete the survey with respect to the Critical Friends Collaboration Model.

Limitations

There were two main limitations that provided difficulties for my study: teacher reluctance and time. Whenever other people are involved, human factors need to be taken into consideration. I had mentioned my study at several staff meetings with the principal's endorsement as well as through numerous emails. I also posted messages on the staff lunchroom white board. I outlined for the teachers what my participation expectations were, that the survey was anonymous and would take less than ten minutes. I also tried persuading people to be a part of the focus group. Unfortunately, only fifteen out of twenty-eight teachers participated in the survey and four agreed to be a part of a focus group.

Another major limitation was time. It was difficult trying to coordinate scheduling with the focus group. There were days when other pressing matters superseded the CFG. Thankfully,

the group was dedicated to helping complete the study. However, time could be a major limiting factor for future implementation.

Action Plan

I plan to discuss my findings with my principal in hopes of gaining support for presenting said findings to the staff during a collaboration meeting. After analyzing the responses of the survey and the suggestions of the focus group, I believe a structured collaboration model could be a solution to several stated problems. According to the results, teachers weren't objectionable to structure as long as there was flexibility in discussion topics. Teachers would like support with students with behavior issues as well as those performing below grade level. Some form of intervention is desired. The Critical Friends Consultancy Protocol could provide teachers an outlet to discuss student behavior and classroom issues. The model could be utilized once a month, during district mandated collaboration time, in accordance with the needs of the group.

There are two other protocols that could benefit teachers at my school. The Tuning Protocol is used to fine tune an assessment, assignment, or project. With the new Common Core Standards, teachers are going to need each other's assistance to aid with new curriculum implementation. The Future Protocol offers guidance for backward planning. Here a teacher could look at the end result (assessment or project) and collaborate with colleagues to discuss the necessary steps to guide students to the end result.

Conclusion

This study allowed me to explore the perceived benefits of a structured collaboration model. The word "structure" does not have to mean administrative dictated. Collaboration can have a structure to guide conversations but does not have to hinder teacher choice. Often times,

during staff collaboration meetings tangential discussions ensue. The Critical Friends Collaboration Model provides a structure that is easy to follow with its strict guidelines, but allows freedom to choose relevant topics of discussion.

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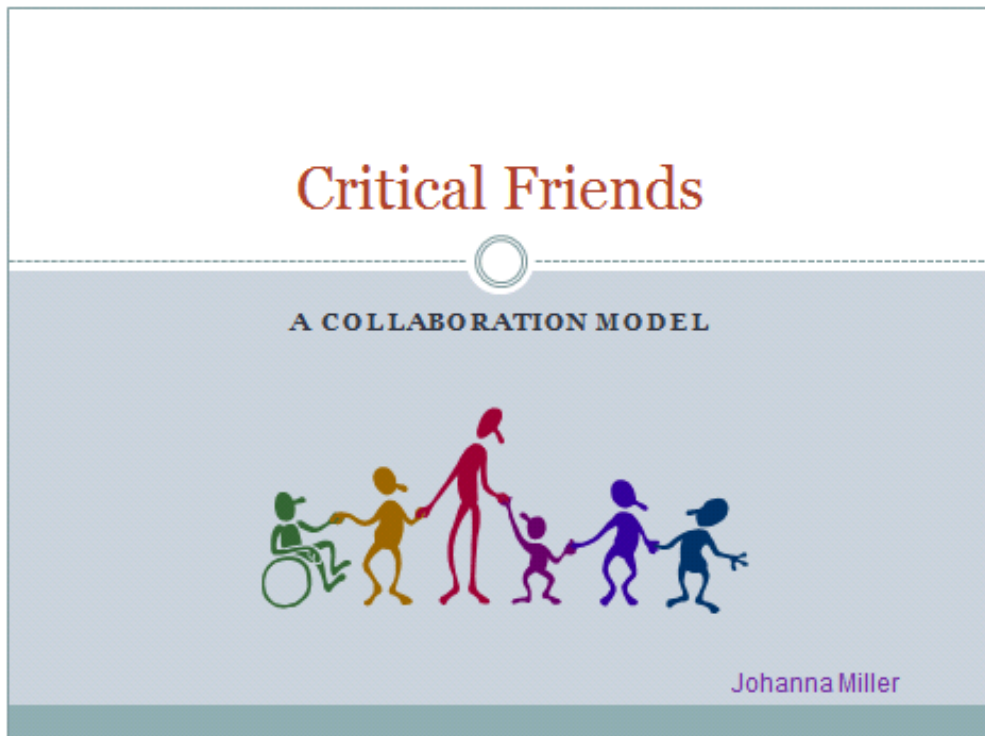
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Appendix A

PowerPoint Presentation on the Critical Friends Collaboration Model



Background



- Created by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform-Brown University (1994)
- Created as educational reform to improve professional development and create a collaborative school culture
 - Focus on the educator and ways to improve student learning and developing and sharing “best practice” strategies



WHAT IS A CRITICAL FRIEND GROUP (CFG)?

Professional Learning Community

- 8-12 educators meet for 2 hours about once a month
Committed to improving their teaching through collaboration

Teachers Demonstrate


- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Shared norms and values ❖ Collaboration ❖ Reflective dialogue ❖ Collective focus on student learning ❖ Spirit of shared responsibility for the learning of all students ❖ Time to meet and talk ❖ Interdependent teaching roles | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Active communication ❖ Teacher empowerment and autonomy ❖ Physical proximity ❖ Openness to improvement ❖ Trust and respect ❖ Knowledge and skills in teaching ❖ Supportive leadership roles |
|---|---|



Group Member Roles

- **Facilitator**
 - Review the process and roles
 - Set time limits and keep time
 - Keeps everyone on topic
 - Participates in the discussion
 - An advocate for the presenter
 - Leads the debriefing process
- **Presenter**
 - Selects a project for feedback
 - Gathers relevant documents and evidence
 - Prepares a focusing question
 - Sits outside the group-does not participate in discussion

- **Discussants**
 - Provide feedback
 - Warm (positive)
 - Cool (critical)
 - Supportive and respectful to presenter and facilitator
 - Contribute to discussion
 - Follow guidelines and norms
 - Provide practical solutions



GETTING STARTED



1. **Select a project, task, or assessment**
 - Collect multiple samples from students at different levels
 - Remove student names from samples
 - Bring enough copies for everyone
2. **Gather relevant contextual documents**
 - Rubrics, timelines, assignment criteria, checklists
3. **Frame a focusing question**
 - Addresses a real interest or concern
 - **Types of questions:**
 - Inputs
 - the assignment
 - Teacher's support of student performance
 - Outputs
 - Quality of student work
 - Teacher's assessment of the work

Guidelines for Learning from Student Work:

(published in HOARCE November 1996, pg. 2, Coalition of Essential Schools)
In "Learning from Student Work", Eric Buchovecky of the ATLAS Communities Project has described a collaborative process adapted from the work of Mark Driscoll at Education Development Center & that of Steve Seidel & others at Harvard University's Project Zero. The piece lays out useful reminders for how participants can stay focused on the evidence before them & on listening to multiple perspectives, rather than getting bogged down in assumptions or evaluations. Those norms are summarized here:

When looking for evidence of student thinking:

- Stay focused on the evidence that is present in the work
- Look openly & broadly; don't let your expectations cloud your vision
- Look for patterns in the evidence that provide clues to how & what the student was thinking.

When listening to colleagues' thinking:

- Listen without judging
- Tune in to differences in perspective
- Use controversy as an opportunity to explore & understand each other's perspectives

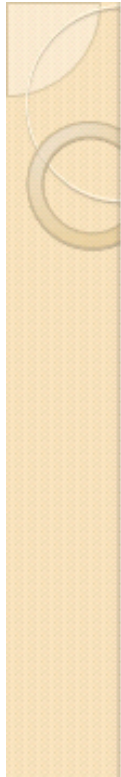
More guidelines!



When you reflect on the process of looking at student work:

- What did you see in this student's work that was interesting or surprising?
- What did you learn about how this student thinks and learns?
- What about the process helped you see and learn these things?
- What did you learn from listening to you colleagues that was interesting or surprising?
- What new perspectives did your colleagues provide?
- How can you make use of your colleagues' perspectives?
- What questions about teaching and assessment did looking at this student's work raise for you?
- How can you pursue these questions further?
- Are there things you would like to try in your classroom as a result of looking at the student's work?






Guidelines cont.

- ❑ Focus on understanding where different interpretations come from
- ❑ Make your own thinking clear to others
- ❑ Be patient and persistent

When reflecting on your own thinking:

- ❑ Ask yourself, "Why do I see this student work in this way? What does this tell me about what is important to me?"
- ❑ Look for patterns in your own thinking
- ❑ Tune in to the questions that the student work & your colleagues' comments raise to you
- ❑ Compare what you see & what you think about the student work with what you do in the classroom

The "Consultancy" Process (Dilemma or Problem Solving)	
(Developed as part of the Coalition of Essential Schools' National Re-Learning Faculty Program & further adapted and revised as part of the work of the Annenberg Institute's National School Reform Faculty Project)	
Step 1: Presenter Overview 5-10 minutes	Step 2: Clarifying Questions 5 minutes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of the dilemma or problem <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Highlights major struggles • Frames a question for the group to consider <p>Tip: Success depends on the quality of the presenter's reflection and question.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the group asks clarifying questions of the presenter <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Questions should have brief, factual answers <p>Tip: Clarifying questions are for the person asking them. They ask the presenter "who, what, where, when, & how" —not "why" Can be answered quickly and succinctly.</p>




Consultancy cont.

Step 3: Probing Questions for the group 10 minutes	Step 4: Group Discussion without the Presenter 15 minutes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions should be worded in a way that helps the presenter clarify and expand their thinking about the dilemma presented • Goal: presenter learns more about the question they framed and/or analyze the dilemma presented • Presenter responds to group's questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No more responses by the group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group discussion about the presented dilemma <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Presenters are NOT allowed to speak <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Listen and take notes • What did you hear? What didn't you hear that might be relevant? What do you think about the problem? • Suggest solutions to the dilemma <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Work to define the issues more thoroughly & objectively

Consultancy cont.

Step 5: Presenter Response 5-10 minutes	Step 6: Debrief Process 5 minutes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presenter responds to the discussion • Whole group discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debrief the consultancy process • Facilitator led • Conversation about the group's observations of the process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What worked? ○ What didn't work? ○ What was learned?




Appendix B

Collaboration Survey

Collaboration Survey

1. How would you define collaboration?



2. How well do teachers at this school collaborate with each other?

- Extremely well
- Very well
- Moderately well
- Slightly well
- Not at all well

Explain. 

3. How much time per month do you collaborate with other teachers and support staff?

- less than 4 hours
- 4 hours- only during collaboration time
- 5 hours

- 6 hours
- more than 6 hours

4. How effective do you feel the current method of collaboration is?

- Very
- More than a little
- A little
- Somewhat
- Not at all

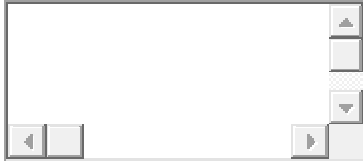
5. What would make collaboration time more effective? Explain.



6. Should collaboration be structured in order to promote consistency among grade levels? Explain.



7. What is the value in cross-grade level collaboration?



8. How satisfied are you with current support procedures for student behavior and performance?

- extremely satisfied
- very satisfied
- moderately satisfied
- somewhat satisfied
- not satisfied

Explain

Powered by SurveyMonkey

Focus Group Survey

1. How effective do you feel the current method of collaboration is?

- Very
- More than a little
- A little
- Somewhat
- Not at all

2. What would make collaboration time more effective? Explain.



3. Should collaboration be structured in order to promote consistency among grade levels? Explain.



4. What is the value in cross-grade level collaboration?



5. How satisfied are you with current support procedures for student behavior and performance?

- extremely satisfied
- very satisfied

- moderately satisfied
- somewhat satisfied
- not satisfied

Explain

Powered by SurveyMonkey

APPENDIX C

Responses to Collaboration Survey

Question 1: How would you define collaboration?

- Answered: 15
- Skipped: 0

Showing 15 responses

1. Grade level discussions regarding curriculum
2. A group or groups of people working together on a common idea or project.
3. Working together for a common cause. Sharing ideas and resources.
4. Sharing data, ideas, and working together to achieve shared goals
5. It is working as a team to address problems and plan curriculum.
6. Collaboration is people getting together to discuss plans, address issues, and offer support.
7. Collaboration is working together, combining ideas for a common goal
8. working together to come to a decision/product that has part of everyone's opinion or work included
9. Colleagues working together to solve problems and create lessons.
10. Working together and sharing best practices.
11. Generously sharing best practices, resources, and novel approaches in an atmosphere of mutual respect and appreciation
12. Working with others to improve communication or desired results
13. Talking with staff or team members about how the curriculum is going, looking at students and talking about where our teaching needs to go next, where the struggles are and how we can meet the needs of our students.
14. Teachers working together to plan curriculum, share best practices, what is working and what is not. BTW our Wednesday collaboration is NOT a good usage of our time. However, [the union president] said principals may do what [our principal] is doing...even if inefficient. Collaboration should also be a sharing of ideas and new things to try and getting help from colleagues when needed.
15. Working with colleagues (grade level or cross grade level) to address classroom and curriculum issues, share ideas, and plan for future units of study.

Question 2: How well do teachers at this school collaborate with each other?

Showing 11 responses

1. We have collaboration meetings with grade levels with some carryover between grade levels, but not consistently.
2. We have regular planning meetings. We share resources. We frequently (usually daily) check in with each other.
3. The majority of the teachers at this school collaborate weekly, if not daily.
4. Grade levels meet together to plan and share ideas
5. Some grade levels work more closely on planning and lessons. Some have a looser connection that allows each teacher's personality and ideas to shine. Some are too loose. Students should be able to count on being taught similar things in similar ways.
6. Teachers work with their grade levels or teams to plan lessons and come up with strategies to help students.
7. Not as much energy and sharing going in.
8. I am speaking of my grade level, where I have first-hand knowledge.
9. My experience has been that people are generally helpful and will respond when asked.
10. I can only speak for my team. I think we collaborate well but it can always be better.
11. We all freely share ideas and exchange materials that supplement subjects. Help and support is also given generously.

Question 5: What would make collaboration time more effective? Explain.

- Answered: 15
- Skipped: 0

Showing 15 responses

1. Our grade level communicates well. We are able to cover all curricular areas. We able to disagree without hurt feelings. This year we have been having mini staff meetings at the beginning of collab time which cuts into our planning time
2. If we were allowed time to develop projects or plans that could be utilized in the classroom setting.
3. More flexibility. We aren't allowed to use the time for prep, but prepping together brings up conversations that lead to specific ideas on implementation that result in collaboration and consistency.
4. Having topics to collaborate about
5. If we could just meet as a team without a intro and wrap up by the principal
6. An agenda would allow us to know what we are supposed to be collaborating on. Also, a live document that is being updated by the group would be nice to track discussions for future reference.
7. Having more time each day to meet and plan. Keeping teachers at the same grade level for multiple years to refine units of study.
8. Focus with a specific goal in mind. For example, instead of planning the week, maybe each person suggesting a project/idea or deciding details on a specific project.

9. Being able to work in our own rooms instead of the library so that we can have all the materials we need. Also being able to work with other schools.
10. More direction with expected outcomes.
11. I would not make certain topics (e.g., field trip planning) off limits during formal collaboration time, nor would time be spent on "sharing out" (since teachers tend to have limited interest in the details of other grade level planning.)
12. Having all parties attend the collaboration.
13. I think everyone in team needs to be on the same page. If they're not then it makes it difficult to discuss student progress and solutions.
14. At our school, being treated as professionals and not having to schlep all of our materials to the library. A leader that can be trusted would be a big bonus too!
15. Collaboration time should not be eaten up with principal/school issues. These should be handled at a separate time. Our time should be respected and we should be treated as professionals and not required to share out at the end of a meeting. The principal should be floating between each group and hear our discussion first-hand.

Question 6: Should collaboration be structured in order to promote consistency among grade levels? Explain.

- Answered: 15
- Skipped: 0

Showing 15 responses

1. No. Administration should help the grade levels that need it.
2. On some levels it would be helpful to have an idea or topic that could be discussed/developed, but we also need those times for developing our own ideas based on the needs of the teachers and grade levels
3. Tasks provide structure and should be given occasionally. Sometimes we should be allowed flexibility to plan according to our needs.
4. Yes- even playing field.
5. no, each grade level has its own problems.
6. Yes, to an extent. Different grade levels need to collaborate on different things so the structure should reflect that. Also, by having the structure that allows for accountability between groups.
7. It should be somewhat structured with time set aside to collaborate but freedom within that time to let ideas and opinions flow.
8. I think that some structure is necessary, but too much structure is like scripted lessons - ineffective.
9. No, I think teachers need to collaborate on their own pressing matters for their grade levels.
10. Yes
11. No. Depending on the needs of the teachers (e.g., one grade level may have new teachers while another may have teachers who have worked together for years), I think the

collaboration should be as flexible as possible. With the implementation of common core, we need to be able to address challenges as they come up; for some grade levels, that might be in math, while for others it might be language arts, while for others it might be giving adequate time to the core subjects of science and social studies. We should be able to address our respective needs.

12. I believe so. If it is not structured people will take advantage and not participate
13. Yes and no. I think it would be nice to have talking points but at the same time I think it would make it hard to discuss things as they are. It's all about what's going on in the classroom, and that is not structured in a set of rules. It needs to be flexible with the students each class has.
14. Collaboration should be structured to support what teachers need! It should not be top down but bottom up.
15. Cross grade level collaboration should be structured. One meeting should be for a grade below and the next for a grade above. Specific areas should be addressed at each meeting.

Question 7: What is the value in cross-grade level collaboration?

- Answered: 15
- Skipped: 0

Showing 15 responses

1. Common language and understanding.
2. It allows students to be prepared for the next grade level
3. Cross grade level collaboration allows a more complete picture of both expectations and background. This leads to more school wide consistency.
4. If conducted the right way it can be helpful.
5. at the beginning and end of the year it could be a valuable tool.
6. It's important to not do the same crafts, projects, etc. Also it allows for each grade to prepare for what their students learned and didn't learn. This will help with long term planning.
7. It is valuable to see what the students need to know and where they are going. Also, to see what we could have taught better or more in depth.
8. Teachers need to know what students are learning in the grade level below and above to help keep expectations high enough without exceeding what students are able to do.
9. We can find out the grade level expectations of the next grade level so we can best prepare them. We can talk about academic gaps that need to be taught so students can be successful.
10. Good heading in to third trimester.
11. Since the common core curriculum is prescribed in such detail, we have little room to modify it based on the student's experiences in prior years. At this time, I see only a limited usefulness to cross-grade level collaboration. On an informal basis, conversing with prior teachers about particular students can be useful. Also, we need to avoid the duplicate reading of certain novels on duplication of field trip destinations, which can be discussed in brief cross-grade level meetings.

12. It allows teachers to discuss ideas and express their needs for the students at their grade level. Upper grade teachers can tell lower grade teachers what their expectations are for their incoming students.
13. We need to know where the students are coming from and where they need to be in order to move on.
14. With common core new this year...I need to know what the grade levels above and below mine need, expect, and would hope for for the following year.
15. I think there is a lot of value to know what the classes below you are studying and what the grades above you will be expecting.

Question 8: How satisfied are you with current support procedures for student behavior and performance?

Showing 11 responses

1. Inconsistencies based on students (i.e. suspension for one student in-house suspension for another)
2. Most students are very well supported. Some low achieving students do not qualify for additional help and each teacher handles this situation differently.
3. There is so much new info how can their performance be judged fairly
4. I don't feel we have much of a behavior interventionist support system. When you are having issues in the classroom, the same information and accommodations are mentioned. If it hasn't worked in the last year or two, it's not going to work. Suspending the gives a child what they want, time off from school. I think parents need to be held more accountable for their child's disruptive behavior. Maybe issue fines like some states do.
5. It is very difficult to move a student through the SST process to be identified for services and support. There is also limited support options to no support for those students who do not qualify.
6. We need more intervention groups and staff to assist with this especially now that we are doing more whole group lessons.
7. Need a leader
8. While it hasn't been a major issue this year, in prior years I would have appreciated a designated place for students who need a time-out from the classroom. Other than what is informally provided by some teachers, along with special assistance for migrant students, we do not have an after school "homework club."
9. There needs to be more support in terms of students that are below the grade level expectation. Reading support, pull out, push in, anything to help those that are struggling to meet the standards.
10. What support?! It is all lip service and then stab you in the back.
11. Our principal seems to spend the majority of her time focusing on a handful of students for repeated behaviors. She also needs to be a more visible presence as a principal (ie. enforcing rules) and not just hanging out with kids.

APPENDIX D

Responses to Focus Group Survey

Question 2: What would make collaboration time more effective? Explain.

- Answered: 4
- Skipped: 0

Showing 4 responses

- A. Using the time to meet my classroom/student needs
- B. Cross grade level time dedicated to cc subjects
- C. I like how a small group (5-6) teachers that were motivated got together to discuss solutions. I felt we made some progress in a short amount of time. Left me feeling we had more options/impact than before.
- D. Intergrade level discussions, and case studies.

Question 3: Should collaboration be structured in order to promote consistency among grade levels? Explain.

- Answered: 4
- Skipped: 0

Showing 4 responses

- A. No....what may be needed in one grade level may not be needed in another. Collaboration should be fluid and not be generic.
- B. Yes. We should have at least a week lead time to prepare for a discussion
- C. Some structure is good, but driven by teachers, not administration. Should focus on what we need, not what the district wants from us.
- D. Yes, so that there is an input/output plan.

Question 4: What is the value in cross-grade level collaboration?

- Answered: 4

- Skipped: 0

Showing 4 responses

- A. Sometimes it is very helpful, if it is a need of the teachers. If it mandated from the top then not so much. The DO [district office] does not know what my classroom or students need.
- B. To be aware of lower grade instruction and upper grade expectations.
- C. We can see/hear what has worked in upper and lower grades. In some cases, we can see what has worked or been tried with a specific child and where to go next. These details are often not available in a child's SST file or cum.
- D. High value.

Question 5: How satisfied are you with current support procedures for student behavior and performance?

- Answered: 4
- Skipped: 0

Showing 3 responses

- A. There isn't much and SST is a tedious, lengthy process. We need to have time to bring up concerns and brainstorm ideas. It would be awesome to have [the school psychologist] in attendance.
- B. There is nothing in place for students with severe behavior issues. I am often used as a time out class. This does not deal with the issue
- C. Other than it taking our time...I thought it was very effective.