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# Examining Teacher Perceptions of Primary Grade Level Collaboration on Professional Development and Growth

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On Professional Development and Growth

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Curriculum and Instruction Doctoral Program

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# EXAMINING TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF PRIMARY GRADE LEVEL

# COLLABORATION ON PROFESSIONAL

# DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH

Tracey Muff
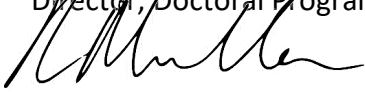
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**ABSTRACT**

Teacher collaboration has been embedded in teachers' schedules across the country as many school leaders believe it improves student achievement. It is mandated within the school system wherein this study was conducted. However, the major emphasis is on student achievement with little to no emphasis on soft skills, which are desperately needed. Teachers need to be trained in fostering learning and on how to be empathetic, supportive, and culturally sensitive. Notwithstanding, if they do not believe collaboration is beneficial to them in the classroom and to their professional development and growth, it would not be an effective tool for student achievement. Students receive their foundational education at the primary grade level, the area of focus of this study. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine teachers' attitudes, experiences, and beliefs regarding the impact of primary grade level collaboration on professional development to strengthen instructional practice leading to higher student achievement. Phenomenological qualitative design was the methodology used. Instruments included Microsoft Forms, an interview and focus group protocol, and a survey. (See Appendices F, G, and H for survey and protocols). Data were collected from consent forms, surveys, interviews, and focus group sessions from nine primary teachers and analyzed using thematic analysis with the assistance of NVIVO software. (See Appendices A, B, C for consent forms). Seven themes emerged related to grade-level, group, and professional development collaborative sessions; planning; peer culture; teacher performance; and instructional practices. The participants agreed that student achievement was linked to professional growth and development; however, it did not emerge as a theme. It was concluded that the teachers believed grade-level collaboration is beneficial in the

teaching and learning process and professional development.  Recommendations for

further study included examining perceptions of other grade-level teachers on the topic.

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**DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to God because I am nothing without him. Everything I am and everything I have is because of you. Thank you for leading and guiding me every step of the way. All the glory, honor, and praise belong to you.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# LIST OF TABLES

**Page**

## LIST OF APPENDICES

**Page**

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE PROBLEM

### Problem Background

Teacher collaboration is essential in the teaching-learning process, as student achievement is linked to instruction (The Wing Institute, 2019). Thus, collaborative planning should be incorporated into teacher schedules within school districts across the country as a means of improving teacher effectiveness. Farbman, Goldberg, and Miller (2014) noted collaborative planning is occasionally called a professional learning community and often consists of grade level teachers. Grade-level collaboration was the focus of this study. A leading indicator that a school is working toward becoming a high reliability school is when "teacher teams and collaborative groups regularly interact to address common issues regarding curriculum, assessment, instruction, and the achievement of all students" (Marzano, 2013, p. 13).

Collaborative planning was a consistent practice in the school district in which this study was conducted. The school district's policy regarding professional learning mandate was that every school must have a scheduled time and a record of minutes on each session. Sessions were primarily used to share best practices and discuss specifics in the teaching-learning process that would "allow teachers to improve their practice and increase student learning" (Farbman et al., 2014, p. 10).

Teachers may soon have options regarding participating in collaborative sessions. The option is now available on a personal basis, but teachers may participate, at least in part, in global collaborative sessions as opposed to only traditional sessions at the school where they teach. The future for teachers who embrace technology and desire to become

global educators revolves around online collaborative platforms (Spirrison, 2016).

Participating in collaborative platforms affords teachers opportunities to "expand

professional learning networks, discover new instructional tools, and share best practices

with other educators" (Spirrison, p. 1) because recognition within and beyond the school

increases as the networks increase.

**Statement of the Problem**

Jacobs (2013) found that teachers believe collaboration improves student

achievement.  However, many have not acquired experience with "quality collaboration"

(Perez, 2015).  Teacher collaborative sessions must be beneficial and well organized if

they are to be effective.  Without a clear understanding of team development, team

members can become frustrated, and issues such as power struggles may arise among

teachers (Perez, 2015).  The purpose of the sessions must be clear, and every teacher in

the group must be committed and knowledgeable of how to collaborate and communicate

(Wellborn, 2012).  Factors that impede teacher collaboration must be eliminated.  Some

of the elements that hinder teacher collaboration include "norms of teacher autonomy,

isolation, and limited instructional support" (Johnston &Tsai, 2018, p. 1).

Wellborn (2012) noted that ample time must be allotted for collaboration.

Farbman et al. (2014) concurred, noting a substantial amount of planning time is needed

for teachers to address issues and complete activities.  Johnson and Tsai (2018)

conducted a survey on a representative sample of 1,825 K-12 teachers employed in the

United States and discovered that 69% noted they did not have enough time to

collaborate with other teachers.

Collaborative planning is mandatory for the teachers in the school at the site of this study. Teachers collaborate three times per week in 50-minute sessions incorporated in their regular schedule. Each session is content-specific, and a protocol designed by the district is followed. Initially, the teachers were trained on each section of the protocol. Because detailed information is required, it is often not completed in the time allotted. Thus, at times, the teachers collaborated outside of their working hours to complete the protocol. This was a challenge, as ample time is a key element in collaboration (Wellborn, 2012).

Mandated teacher collaboration with a protocol is good, but it should include provisions for teachers to discuss, share and learn how to master other competencies and soft skills that aid in improving instructional strategies. Attakorn, Tayut, Pisitthawat, and Kanokorn, (2014) noted that teachers can master soft skills such as exhibiting empathy and understanding cultures and demonstrate them in the classroom. The current collaborative planning protocol used by the teachers at the site of this study did not provide opportunities for teachers to discuss, share, or learn how to become proficient in or master soft skills. The focus was primarily on how to help the students become academically proficient. Topics included the standard for the lesson, learning targets, assessments, instructional resources, and next steps. While these topics were major, discussions on soft skills such as those listed by Attakorn et al. (2014) were needed to help the students acquire academic success.

Collaboration is a major focus of professional development for teachers in the United States; however, globally, more than 30% of teachers view teacher collaboration as a top priority (Global State of Digital Learning Survey, 2018). Because collaboration

is incorporated extensively in American schools in efforts to improve instruction, there was a need to explore teachers' views on collaboration in general, and a specific need to explore grade-level collaboration to discover if teachers viewed it as a viable and effective method to improve instructional strategies.

**Research Site**

This study was conducted in an inner-city elementary school located within the center of a state in the southeastern section of the United States.  Student enrollment was 447.  The teaching staff consisted of 18 general education K-5 teachers, one pre-kindergarten teacher, four special education teachers, one music teacher, and one physical education teacher.  Also, on staff was an academic coach, a counselor, a speech pathologist, and four paraprofessionals.  The Title I school had been designated a *priority* school in *Needs Improvement* status by the State Department of Education because student performance results had been below average on state mandated tests.  The school has been on the *Needs Improvement* list for 10 years.  The list is an itemization of low performing schools within the state.  As depicted in Table 2, the school's climate rating was high quality—four stars, with five being the highest.  This rating demonstrated how close the school was to academic success.  It was determined by data collected from several sources: (a) attendance records of students and employees—administrators, teachers, and support staff, (b) discipline, (c) Parent Survey, (d) State of Study School Personnel Survey, and (e) the State of Study Student Health Survey.  The school is close to being removed from the needs improvement list.  According to the State of Study Department of Education (2018), the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) target was 60.  Table 2 depicts the school's CCRPI of 55.5.  The index informed

how well schools prepared students for the next grade level and for college and career readiness.  Also depicted in Table 2 is the Performance Letter. Grade of failing.

Table 1

*Teacher Composition*

| Ethnicity | Regular Education | Special Education | Music | Physical Education | Pre-Kindergarten |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| African-American | 15 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Caucasian | 03 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Table 2

*School Ratings*

| Climate Rating | 4 |
|---|---|
| CCRI | 55.5 |
| Performance Letter Grade | Failing |

## The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' attitudes, experiences, and beliefs regarding the impact of primary grade level collaboration on professional development to strengthen instructional practice leading to higher student achievement. The goal of this study was to understand primary grade-level collaboration and its influence on professional development.  Thus, because the intent of this study was to acquire knowledge of teacher interactions during professional development, the qualitative research design was selected.  Emphasis was placed on acquiring an

understanding of the perceptions of teachers regarding their use of primary grade-level collaboration and developing ideas to help teachers experience success in professional development (Talbot, 2015).

## Research Questions

The central research question was "What are the perceptions of primary teachers regarding key attributes of a grade-level collaborative session that fosters professional development?" The related questions are listed below.

1. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the impact of collaboration on growth and development?

2. What perceptions are held by teachers on the use of collaboration to build collegiality?

3. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the benefits of grade level collaboration?

4. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the drawbacks of grade level collaboration?

## Definition of Terms

**Collaboration** – A mode of working together toward education reforms. It describes a relationship that collaborative partners want to achieve (Egodawatte, McDougall, & Stoilescu, 2011, p. 191).

**Collegiality** – A feeling of belongingness and support. Important element of school effectiveness and teacher development (Shah, 2012, p. 1243).

**Dialogism** - A feature of all verbal exchanges which involve an individual utterance by one person that requires an utterance in response (Crafton, & Kaiser, 2011, p. 109).

**Human Capital –** "A teacher's cumulative abilities, knowledge, and skills developed through formal education and on-the-job experience" (Leana, 2011, p. 32).

**Instructional Strategies** –All methods used by teachers to actively engage students in the teaching-learning process (Meador, D., 2018).

**Interdependence -** An attribute of association built on confidence and respect.  It is the instrument for building mutual reliance between "groups of teachers organized into teams—grade-level groups, departments, and small professional learning communities, each headed by a leader who facilitates the group's work and guides it toward a common end" (Burgess & Bates, p. 1, 2019).

**Social Capital –** Relationships among teachers.  Social capital is considered to be strong when teacher relationships are trusting and interactions are frequent (Leana, 2011).

## Limitations and Delimitations

### Limitations

The sample size was a limitation to this study.  It consisted of fewer than ten schools in one school district, as the study was conducted in one school in one school district in the southeastern part of the United States.  The lack of diversity in the selection of the participants was another limitation.  All participants were Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 5 teachers.  The participants were selected from the district in which I was employed.  The lack of diversity in the training for implementation of collaboration to improve teacher effectiveness was a third limitation.  The participants were from the same school district who received the same training in the implementation of collaborative planning.   It is possible that the data collected did not represent the authentic views of the participants.  Thus, a fourth limitation to the study was that some

participants may have felt they were expected to respond a certain way, even though they were told responses would be confidential.

**Delimitations to the Study**

Establishing boundaries for research studies such as geographic location, population, and sampling size limited the scope of the study (Simon & Goes, 2012). This study was conducted in one school district in the central section of a southern state in the United States. Only primary teachers were asked to participate. The confines set for this study included purposive sampling and small size as only nine participants were included.

## Importance of the Study

Improving teacher effectiveness is a top priority established by the United States Department of Education. Success is judged in the transformation of the teaching profession, which involves teacher effectiveness being assessed by student performance (Transforming the Teaching Profession, 2012). One of the core elements established by the Department of Education is continuous growth and professional development. Teachers are expected to continuously collaborate and think about their methods of teaching and how to improve them (Transforming the Teaching Profession, 2012). However, creating and sustaining effective professional learning communities can be challenging, as barriers exist that keep teachers from collaborating effectively (Gabriel-Petit, 2017). To aid in minimizing these barriers, schools are identifying a collaborative practice that supports teachers working as a collective unit. The identified practice is grade level collaborative planning. While there are numerous ways teachers can plan collaboratively, Hattie (2012) asserted that the greatest way is to work together to create

plans, cultivate mutual understandings of what should be taught, work together on understanding perspectives, and work together to assess the influence on student performance.

Teacher perceptions are extremely important. Webb and Thomas (2015) listed teacher perceptions as one of the factors that affect student achievement. Student achievement has been linked to instruction and teacher effectiveness. Teacher effectiveness has been linked to teacher development and growth, and collaborative planning sessions have been incorporated in teacher schedules to improve teacher effectiveness. Thus, continued research is critical as educators seek to find the most effective and impactful ways in which to support student achievement through sound instructional practices. Thus, this study was necessary to analyze teacher perceptions of grade-level collaborative learning on development and growth and their ability to collaborate. It would contribute to existing research on teacher perceptions of collaboration by adding the teacher's voice to the research.

**CHAPTER TWO**

**REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Collaboration is prevalent across organizational lines, including business and education. Egodawatte, McDougall, and·Stoilescu (2011) noted that in the field of education, the term *collaboration* is applied to define a method of working collectively toward reforms. It does not mean getting rid of distinct differences. The art of collaboration (or working collaboratively) involves discussing varied views and responsibilities of individuals in the relationship (Egodawatte et al., 2011). It is beneficial in teacher education, as it affords the participants personal and professional development.

Nixon (2014) expressed that collaboration provides opportunities to work in a diverse setting and to flip the notion of working with someone different into something positive and identify what can be balanced. Collaboration drives the organization to develop into a learning entity, which will in turn become a growing organization (Nixon, 2014). There are, however, numerous barriers and restrictions that make it problematical for teachers to "engage in interactions to generate new insights into their teaching dilemmas and to foster instructional innovations" (Egodawatte et al., 2011, p. 192). These barriers are attributed to the individual personalities of the participants, team, or group preferences, relative resources, and controls.

In Chapter 2, I present a brief review of the literature relevant to teachers' perceptions of primary grade level collaboration on professional development and growth. Information is presented on the Constructivist Theory, the theoretical lens through which the study was conducted. General information is presented on

collaboration, and specific information is presented on collaboration as it pertains to teaching and learning in the areas of professional development, collegiality, and teacher perceptions.

## Literature Review

### Theoretical Framework

Bada (2015) explained that constructivism is an established learning theory in psychology which describes how individuals may obtain information and learn. The founders of constructivism, or philosophers of the view include Dewey, Bruner, Vygotsky, Piaget, Bednar, Cunningham, Duffy, Perry and von Glasersfeld. According to Bada (2015), the theory proposes that individuals build or construct information and meaning from their experiences and reflect on them. The theory of constructivism revolves around active learning. Bada (2015) concluded: (a) teachers should reflect on their teaching practices to apply knowledge they have acquired to their practice, (b) constructivist teachers inspire students to continuously evaluate how a task is assisting them to acquire understanding, and (c) questioning strategies result in improved learning.

### Types of Collaboration

Nixon (2014) acknowledges that various types of collaborations exist. Collaborations may be done in person, virtually, digitally, or through a platform. The greatest desire is to collaborate in person—to work together—face-to-face on specific tasks. Five reasons collaboration is important in growing a business are: (a) self-awareness, (b) scale, (c) creative abrasion, (d) take the long view, and (e) learn, learn, and learn more (Nixon, 2014, p. 1). Regarding failures in collaborating, Nixon (2014) made three suggestions: (a) take the long view, (b) do not give up, and (c) look at the

whole picture. Nixon concluded that the use of collaboration results in more positive outcomes because of the combination of human resources.

**Team Development**

Perez (2015) indicated that team members need a knowledge of how teams develop. If they do not understand team development, the result may be frustration and power struggles. Graham and Ferriter (2008) identified four stages of team development as forming, storming, norming, and performing, respectively. The simplest stage was labeled forming, which is filled with excitement and expectation. Introductions are made and processes and procedures are put into place. Differing views on procedures or teaching practices and goals may arise during the storming stage. This may be because many educators are quite sensitive about their teaching strategies, and sharing or discussing them may be difficult. Often in this stage, team members feel protective. Norming occurs when the team members become more comfortable with collaborating and start viewing collaboration as a positive rather than a negative. As a result, productivity increases, and relations improve. The focus changes to acquiring agreement via input from all members. Performing, the last stage of development, involves the team accomplishing or achieving. Discussions ensue, disagreements may surface, but they are discussed as a team, understanding the essential goal—to improve the learning environment (Graham & Ferriter, 2008).

Clayton (2015) contended that norms are critical in collaborative learning sessions, as they manage team members' actions or activities. Norms set expectations and accountability and foster risk taking and engagement; thus, they must be established. Norms also denote guarantees made among members of the team, confirm responsibility

and trust, serve as a safeguard for team members, and reinforce the involvement. Because norms are specific to individual teams; all teams should establish their own norms (Clayton, 2015).

Protocols should be used to maintain deep, important conversations that help the team accomplish goals as they are procedures in place that regulate the conversations based on the team norms; they are used as a guide for the conversations. The use of protocols in collaborative learning sessions is greatly beneficial. Clayton (2015) listed the following benefits and concluded that norms and protocols aid learning teams in accomplishing established objectives.

- Ensure a safe, equitable, and trusting environment where team members are safe to ask questions of one another

- Ensure meaningful and sustained dialogue

- Structure the time during meetings

- Provide built in time to think and time to listen without the need for team members to continually respond

- Promote reflection by individuals and teams

- Help members gain differing perspectives and insights

- Focus the team's work on the issue at hand •

- Prevent off topic conversations

- Prevent individual team members from dominating the conversation (p. 3)

**Impact of Collaboration on Student Achievement and Teacher Effectiveness**

Leana (2011) conducted a study on perceptions of math competency levels of more than 1,200 kindergarten through fifth grade teachers in the New York City school

district.  The teachers were asked about their level of education and experience.  They were also asked to whom they conversed when they had questions, needed assistance, or advice, and about the degree of trust they had in the source or sources.  Education and experience did not predict student achievement; frequent collaborations with trusted colleagues on instructional issues yielded gains.  Leana (2011) stated, "The students experienced higher gains in math achievement when their teachers reported frequent conversations with their peers that centered on math, and when there was a feeling of trust or closeness among teachers," (p. 33).  The teachers were twice as likely to request assistance from fellow colleagues than from academic coaches assigned by the school district and four times more likely to request assistance from one another than from the principal.  Findings indicated that when teachers are highly competent and possess quality collaborative skills, they can continue to learn from collaborating with one another and develop their instructional practices even more (Leana, 2011).

Hattie (2016) found that collective teacher efficacy is a strong determinant of student achievement by conducting a comparative analysis of factors that impact student achievement, including socioeconomic status, prior achievement, home environment and parental involvement with collective teacher efficacy.  Findings indicated that collective teacher efficacy is more than three times stronger and predictive of student achievement than socioeconomic status, home environment and parental involvement, student motivation and concentration, persistence, and engagement. Donohoo, Hattie, and Eells (2018) concurred with Hattie (2016) in concluding that because collective teacher efficacy impacts teacher perceptions and behaviors, it strongly impacts school culture. When collective teacher efficacy is evident, school culture tends to be reflective of

perceptions that suggest high student performance is expected (Hattie & Zierer, 2018).

Collective, or shared language that puts the emphasis on the learning process also impacts

teacher behavior.  The shared belief is that individual methods of teaching must be

assessed and the impact on student achievement evaluated, as the teaching and learning

process is directly connected to student success and failure.

Donohoo et al. (2018) noted that efforts of educators increase when collective

efficacy exists in the culture of the school.  Because high expectations for success exist as

the norm, educators are incredibly determined to make it all happen.  Student

achievement is indirectly impacted by collective teacher efficacy via teaching behaviors

which consist of implementing strategies that produce high outcomes (Donohoo et al,

2018).  Examples of these behaviors include: (a) incorporating literacy lessons in math,

science, English-Language Arts, and social studies classrooms, (b) requesting parental

engagement, and (c) seeking positive means to deal with discipline issues (Cantrell &

Calloway, 2008; Kirby & DiPaola, 2011; Gibbs & Powell, 2011).

Negative perceptions of teachers result in an adverse effect.  If teachers believe

they are helpless in encouraging student achievement, this negative perception permeates

the culture of the school.  Additionally, when teacher collective efficacy is nonexistent,

teachers do not follow specific practices because of low expectations or the perception

that they or the students are not capable of achieving successful results.  Donohoo et al.

(2018) concurred with TschannenMoran and Barr (2004) in concluding that perceptions

adversely affect school culture and that negativism flows throughout, resulting in lowered

efforts of teachers and students, low expectations, and low performance.  Gibbs and

Powell (2011) discovered that in school cultures where collective teacher efficacy is non-

existent, teachers and administrators are more apt to attribute failure to the students because they believe the students do not possess the ability to be successful.  Teachers and administrators with this mindset also tend to seek exclusion for students who are challenging.

Collective teacher efficacy is strengthened when student achievement, confirmed by performance on assessments, increases because of teaching performance (Donohoo et al., 2018.  Teachers and school administrators, however, must be assisted in making the connection between their collective behaviors and student achievement.  In understanding the impact, collaborative teams must assess student learning by reviewing selected artifacts that indicate progress.  The review should include communications with the students about their learning experiences, progress, challenges, and drive to continue learning, noted that an understanding of the connection is important because teachers need to know that student performance is within their collective area of influence (Donohoo et al., 2018).

Fostering a collaborative culture emphasizing understanding the power of individual impact influences the collective efficacy beliefs of the teachers, which would result in student achievement (Donohoo et al., 2018).  Establishing this type culture is done through teacher collaborations about the importance of influence, the difference between accomplishment targets and development, and about the use of reliable evidence.  Collaborating aids in changing the mindset of the teachers from concerns about tasks to more comprehensive concerns about impact (Donohoo et al., 2018).

Teachers are permitted to center their tasks around results.  Collective teacher efficacy can be influenced by establishing expectations in terms of the frequency, type of

collaboration, and elevated levels of confidence for the collaboration to occur (Donohoo et al., 2018).  The focus should be on recognizing areas that need improvement and identifying issues that need to be addressed in the classroom.  Another focus should be on utilizing various types of evidence to decide the impact of the teaching methodology and making necessary changes (Donohoo et al., 2018).

How collaboration is established determines the impact on student achievement. For the teaching and learning process to aid in building collective understandings, accountable collaborative structures must be established with a higher level of confidence.  Thus, the key to success is quality of collaboration and the power of believing that greater success can be achieved collectively (Donohoo et al, 2018).

Gabriel-Petit (2017) contended that the result of effective collaboration is improved teaching and learning and that improvement is evident in teacher and student performance.  Perez (2015) alluded to two schools in Ohio that provide continuous collaborative opportunities for the teachers and whose students increased math scores 20%.  The increase was attributed to teacher collaboration, as the level of teacher effectiveness is linked to the level of student effectiveness.

**Employee Reactions to Organizational Change**

Change is inevitable, even on the job.  Employees react differently to change; some react positively while others react negatively or simply remain neutral.  Employees express fear, anger, ambivalence, or enthusiasm to change in the workplace (Travis, 2019).  When some employees learn that change is impending, they become fearful and seriously concerned about job satisfaction and security.  Other concerns center around whether a demotion or reduction in pay is imminent.  Some employees may become

hostile upon learning that change is forthcoming.  They may become outwardly emotional or suppress their hostility to change.  If the hostility is disregarded or not handled properly by management, negative talk could destroy organizational management's attempts to change.  Some employees may not oppose change but not be totally receptive to change (Travis, 2019).  Others may be totally receptive to change and know that change is needed for organizational success.

Kunze (2013) conducted a study on the relationship between employees' age and their resistance to change.  The sample consisted of 2,981 employees from varied organizations.  The older employees were actively engaged in the workforce.  Findings revealed the older employees were slightly more opened to change than the younger employees.

**Collaboration and Professional Development**

Not all educators are open to collaboration, especially those who have been successful working independently, as they may perceive collaboration as a waste of time (Perez, 2015).  In examining the prevalence of teacher collaboration in schools across the country in 2016, Johnston and Tsai (2018) presented major findings from a report, which included a review of the degree to which teacher collaboration differs in schools with various levels of students of low socioeconomic status.  Teacher collaboration was the focus, and it revolved around the frequency of opportunities, collaborative activities, and the value of collaborative experiences.  Only approximately 30% of the teachers indicated they did not have ample time for collaborative sessions, and teachers who reported having ample time and numerous opportunities to collaborate constantly noted their collaborative activity levels were higher.  Approximately 40% reported never

having observed a colleague's classroom to obtain instructional tips or to provide feedback. Only approximately 5% noted they had never engaged in collaborations, and approximately 40% noted they collaborate at least once per week. The poverty level of the school was not linked to opportunities to collaborate or how often the collaborative activities were scheduled. There was no connection between how often the teachers collaborated and apparent supportiveness among teachers in schools with high poverty levels.

Egodawatte et al. (2011) conducted an inquiry project on collaborative teaching in 11 schools with the two-fold goal of improving: (a) the teaching-learning process of Ninth Grade Applied Mathematics and (b) professional development activities for teachers. Collaborative teams at each school were comprised of teachers and administrators of all levels of experience. As the teachers embraced an open-minded approach to working with and learning from peers, they capitalized on one another's personal strengths and expertise. The older or experienced teachers were a resource of knowledge but indicated that they benefitted from exposure to current instructional practices. The results were organized into six themes: "achieving the goals, student success, professional development, co-planning and co-teaching opportunities, increased communication, and improved technological skills," (Egodawatte et al., p. 194). The findings revealed that collaboration aided the participants in expanding their knowledge and skills in the six areas.

Williams (2010) asserted that action research is the key to improving student achievement. Thus, teachers must understand and implement it in professional development sessions. It is through implementation of consistent professional

development that student achievement is impacted.  Documenting collaborative

professional development is vital because it provides evidence of implementation

(Williams, 2010).

**Collegiality**

Goldberg, Siegel, and Goldberg (2015) led a multidimensional professional

learning session that involved 45 teachers across grade levels--K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12.

Teachers discussed and reviewed samples of student work in argument writing, then

reviewed it as if they were the students sitting in class.  Next, they were asked to have

their students do the same activity the next day, answering the same questions.

Afterwards, using an online document, they reported their individual experiences.  The

sessions enabled the teachers to collaborate with teachers across grade levels and reflect

on student skills in analyzing argument writing.  The collaborative session positively

impacted student achievement, as teachers applied the acquired knowledge and the

engaging activities in their classrooms and achieved desired results (Goldberg et al.,

2015).  Ample time, immediate application, and a focus on student learning, including a

review of student work samples are needed to ensure a positive learning experience

(Goldberg et al., 2015).

Collegiality is viewed as a major facet of professional development for teachers

and is considered an instrument used to increase teacher awareness (Shah, 2012). Strong

and healthy collegial relationships among teachers are essential for school effectiveness

and teacher enhancement.  Thus, teachers should know the importance of working

collaboratively and to concentrate on commonalities.  In schools with collegial

environments, teachers become more open to innovative ideas, teaching strategies, and resources (Shah, 2012).

Collegiality creates a sense of belonging among team members and makes the connections more unified. Beginning teachers generally receive more support because of collegiality (Shah, 2012). Additionally, collegiality brings veteran and beginning teachers closer to strengthen their knowledge and confidence (Little, 2012). Perhaps the most important reason to practice collegiality among teachers is because it is linked to student achievement (Shah, 2012).

McDowell (2004) and Barrett (2006) compared the degree of collaboration in four high schools. Student performance in two of the schools was high, but it was low in the other two schools. Findings indicated that teachers at the high performing schools collaborated more than those in the low-performing schools.

Because the educational system is marked by continuous change, teacher collegiality is crucial, as it is viewed as an opportunity to involve many individuals in solving the compound issues in educational reform efforts (Shah, 2012). In schools, collegiality is an important source of enrichment in: (a) teacher professional growth, (b) student learning, and (c) school effectiveness. Thus, a considerable number of teachers at any given school must strongly believe collegiality is linked to student achievement for it to work (Shah, 2012).

**Teacher Perceptions of Collaboration**

Principals, the instructional leaders in schools, are instrumental in the success of teacher collaboration, as teacher perceptions of collaboration are contingent on how supportive principals are for change. If principals take the lead in encouraging the

teachers to use collaboration to improve instruction, teacher collaboration would be more beneficial and student achievement improved (Berebitsky, Goddard, & Carlisle, 2014).

Sawyer and Rim-Kaufman (2007) found that a positive relationship exists between perceptions of teachers about the school environment and teacher collaboration. Another finding was that teachers highly perceive collaboration as a valuable tool. Additionally, findings indicated that teachers feel more involved in decision-making.

Dor (2011) examined perceptions of homeroom and special education teachers toward home-school collaboration in Israeli schools. Findings revealed positive perceptions were expressed between homeroom, elementary, and secondary special education teachers about home-school collaboration. The positive perceptions led to a high level of start-ups of home-school collaborative teams.

Hagelman (2013) found no statistically significant differences between teacher perceptions of collaboration and involvement in instruction. Findings also revealed co-teachers believed that the collaborative teaching method was suitable for most of the students in the special education classes. None of the special education co-teachers thought the collaborative process was inappropriate for the students they served.

Sindberg (2013) examined the music teachers' perceptions of several factors, including collaboration. The findings revealed all participants felt collaboration is important. They communicated a compelling desire to collaborate with fellow teachers to share experiences and provide support. Some felt collaboration should be informal. The PLC meetings, which were held after school, filled that need. The participants felt collaborative meetings should meet the needs of teachers as well as those of the students.

They felt conversations and collaborations are major and serve as an aid in bringing about positive changes in student performance.

Teacher perceptions of librarians as collaborative partners are somewhat uncertain, as it is relatively new. Montiel-Overall and Jones (2011) found that teachers view collaboration with librarians as significant in the teaching-learning process with students. However, teachers generally do not collaborate with librarians as a collaborative team, but they continue to communicate with them conventionally. The lack of communication may be because librarians do not tout their teaching skills as their role has changed to include teaching and co-teaching, or partnering. If librarians would express to teachers that they are also teachers, teacher perceptions of the teaching-learning process with librarians might change (Montiel-Overall and Jones, 2011).

For the change to occur, librarians must communicate to the teachers how working collaboratively to connect information collected with a lesson would be beneficial. For it to transpire, teachers must fully understand the connection. The collaborative process should involve including teachers in discussions, explaining the process, and providing reasons for connecting library instruction and course content to improve student learning. Also, the librarians must thoroughly communicate the goals and literacy standards established for the library curriculum. Additionally, librarians must be knowledgeable of the standards for the various grade-level content areas. Montiel-Overall and Jones (2011) concluded that the school librarian association should take the lead in informing the education community about teacher and librarian collaboration.

**Collaborative Barriers**

Organizational leaders must be cognizant of the barriers that exist in collaborative efforts in their organization (Gabriel-Petit, 2017). Johnston and Tsai (2018) concurred, noting that many elements block support of teacher collaboration. These elements include norms of independence, separation, and minimal instructional support from school administrators, and they might be specifically prominent in high-poverty schools. (Johnston & Tsai, 2018).

A survey is the suggested first step in detecting the actions or activities that impede collaboration within the organization. The next step would be to design solutions to address the barriers. The last step would be to do what is necessary to motivate the individuals involved to change their conduct or actions that are disrupting the collaborative efforts. Gabriel-Petit (2017) listed the following as common barriers to collaboration: (a) "lack of respect and trust, (b) different mindsets, (c) Poor listening skills, (d) knowledge deficits, (e) lack of alignment around goals, (f) internal competitiveness, (g) information hoarding, (h) organizational silos, (i) physical separation (p.1)."

**A lack of respect and trust**. Maintaining respect and trust is crucial in the collaborative process, as they form the basis for many obstacles to collaboration. When respect and trust are lacking in collaborative efforts, diversity is often the culprit, as some individuals seem to have a lack of respect and trust for individuals who are different in terms of ethnicity, age, or gender, or who have different backgrounds in the world of business. Chief among the many recommended suggestions for removing the barrier of a lack of respect and trust is the promotion of higher levels of direct interaction across

teams (Gabriel-Petit, 2017).

 **Different mindsets.** While varied mindsets on collaborative teams are good, they can present some challenges.  The challenges may be in the form of friction because of opposing views.  Promoting or cultivating understanding among the members of the collaborative team who have different mindsets may minimize or overcome the challenges.  This should lead to an appreciation of differences of opinion and promote an openness to all team members to use their creative minds and share their creative thoughts in efforts to successfully complete the task (Gabriel-Petit, 2017).

 **Poor listening skills.** Poor listening skills on the part of collaborative team members could be a disaster for the project on which they may be working.  Good listening skills are essential in collaborative efforts.   In describing poor listeners, Gabriel-Petit (2017) described stated:

> Poor listeners seem distracted or inattentive.  They do not look at, make eye contact with, give their full attention to, or engage with whoever is currently speaking.  They often interrupt, making comments or asking questions that take the conversation off track.  They exhibit bias, jump to conclusions, and finish others' sentences.  They show no empathy for those who are speaking.  They provide no encouraging feedback.  Their responses to others' ideas may be judgmental or dismissive (Gabriel-Petit, 2017, p. 5)

 **Knowledge deficits.** Gabriel-Petit (2017) contended that knowledge deficits can adversely affect a collaborative effort. The deficits can be in the form of team members having no foundational understanding of the work of their fellow team members, perhaps causing a breakdown in communication.  Other knowledge deficits may be that the

individuals or the data needed to complete the task are unavailable.  Also, conveying knowledge to peers in other collaborative groups is a complicated process.  Some suggestions for removing the barrier of deficit knowledge were: (a) pair and share with members of other related groups working on the task, (b) identify contact individuals on diverse teams, and (c) build effective relationships across teams (Gabriel-Petit, 2017).

**A lack of alignment around goals.**  The key to effectively accomplishing collaborative tasks is to ensure that every team member knows the purpose and that everything is aligned with the established goals.  When there is no alignment with a common purpose, other issues tend to escalate.  The solution for removing the barrier of a lack of alignment around goals, as outlined in the above list of suggestions for collaborative teams is to be goal-oriented, set priorities and norms, and establish accountability (Gabriel-Petit, 2017).

**Internal competitiveness.**  Companies that promote internal competition are considered dysfunctional. Gabriel-Petit (2017) listed several suggestions for removing this barrier.  The overall recommendation was that collaborative teams should practice cooperation within the organization and competition on the outside.  In doing so, they should work in unity and establish reward systems for conduct that exhibit collaborative values (Gabriel-Petit, 2017).

**Information hoarding.**  This barrier to collaborative efforts promotes internal competition.  Some team members who have expertise in specific areas but do not share their knowledge.  These team members often overlook requests for assistance and are known as information hoarders.  Behavior of this type does not help the collaborative process.  Some suggestions for removing this barrier include: (a) promoting the sharing

of information, (b) establishing a reward system for individuals and teams for sharing information and participating in a mentoring program created to transmit knowledge across teams, and (c) holding individuals accountable who withhold information (Gabriel-Petit, 2017).

**Organizational silos.** High and low status teams within the same organization often work in isolation because one team may feel superior and the other inferior. In efforts to remove the barrier of organizational silos, it is recommended to not utilize the strategy of working in isolation because of the strong possibility of experiencing a deficiency of new ideas within the collaborative group and a lack of diverse opinions (Gabriel-Petit, 2017). Research reveals school culture should be less isolating and more collaborative, and creating multidisciplinary teams, bringing together individuals from across the organization to collaborate on tasks is the best strategy (Gabriel-Petit, 2017; McDowell, 2004; Barrett, 2006).

**Physical separation.** When collaborative team members are detached, there is no time to develop the type relationships needed in collaborating. It is difficult to locate individuals and information. The Coronavirus (COVID-19) caused team members in many organizations, including schools, to be detached, with no shared physical workplace. Employees were physically separated but were connected via data and communication technological tools (Sinclair, Allen, Barber, Bergman, Britt, Butler, Ford, Hammer, Kath, Probst, & Yuan, 2020). Millions of employees had to adapt to working from home. Many school administrators, staff and teachers started the school year working from home. Many school systems across the country were engaged in distance learning, with teachers using technology to teach the lessons remotely and the students

using technology to learn. To remove this barrier of physical separation, the following

recommendations were suggested: (a) face-to-face meetings at least quarterly, (b)

common hours when all members can work together, and (c) scheduling virtual meetings

online (Gabriel-Petit, 2017).  School administrators could schedule virtual staff meetings,

and teachers and counselors could schedule virtual student and parent meetings.

In reporting several challenges regarding implementing collaborative planning,

Egodawatte et al. (2011) concurred with Gabriel-Petit (2017), particularly in the areas of

communication, alignment of goals, and physical meeting location.  One challenge was

the lack of communication within the school.  Another was finding time to

collaboratively plan lessons.  Difficulty in maintaining consistency because of high

turnover for various reasons beyond the team's control was a third challenge.  The main

challenge was changing the culture and teaching practices (Egodawatte et al, 2011).

**CHAPTER THREE**

**METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' attitudes, experiences, and beliefs regarding the impact of primary grade level collaboration on professional development to strengthen instructional practice leading to higher student achievement. It was conducted in an inner-city elementary school within a school district located in the central section of a southeastern state within the United States. The focus of the research was on the perceptions of teachers regarding grade level collaboration and how it influences teachers' growth and development. Thus, an attempt was made to answer the central research question: "What are the perceptions of primary teachers regarding key attributes of a grade-level collaborative session that fosters professional development?" and the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the impact of collaboration on growth and development?

2. What perceptions are held by teachers on the use of collaboration to build collegiality?

3. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the benefits of grade level collaboration?

4. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the drawbacks of grade level collaboration?

Specifically, the research design; population and sampling procedures; instrumentation; procedures; and methodological assumptions, limitations, and delimitations are discussed in this chapter.

**Research Design**

A qualitative study was the selected design used in this study. It is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2014) concluded that qualitative research is vital in discovering perceptions of people regarding events in which they are or have been involved. It is exploratory in nature and focuses on obtaining an understanding and creating ideas or hypotheses (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research would aid me in capturing the very essence of teachers' thoughts, perceptions, and misconceptions centered around professional learning communities. Specifically, it would permit me to collect and analyze insightful data to assist in answering the research questions. Creswell (2009) concluded that collected data are beneficial when surveying many participants and following up on a few to obtain their specific language and beliefs about a topic. The qualitative design permitted me to collect information from interviews, surveys, and focus group discussions (Creswell, 2013), which disclosed commonalities. A defining aspect of qualitative research is the emergent nature of qualitative designs. Patton (2002) described qualitative designs as needing to be flexible and open to adaptation as change occurs in a study. The focus of this study was on perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of the participants (Creswell, 2013).

Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) noted that the focus of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is on examining how individuals make meaning of their life experiences. In this study, I sought to understand how teacher collaboration influences teacher development and growth via perspectives of teachers. Throughout the process, the participants deduced what collaboration means to them. Because I collected

data from various sources in attempts to make meaning of the lived experiences of the participants regarding grade level collaboration and professional development and growth, the design of this qualitative study was phenomenological.

I studied Research Question 1 by collecting data on key questions regarding the beliefs, feelings, and experiences of the respondents on how collaboration influences their development and growth. I analyzed the collected data from the survey, interviews, and focus group discussions. I studied Research Question 2 by collecting data on key questions regarding the respondents' beliefs on what constitutes effective collaboration and by analyzing the three sources of data utilized in the study. I studied Research Question 3 by collecting data on the benefits the respondents have experienced from the collaboration process and by analyzing the results from the survey, interviews, and focus group sessions.

**Subjects**

**Population.** I conducted this study at an inner-city elementary school located within the central section of a state in the southeastern United States. Eighteen regular education teachers in grades K-5 were employed at the site, and 447 students were enrolled. Additional staff members included an academic coach, four special education teachers, one music teacher, one physical education teacher, one speech pathologist, one pre-kindergarten teacher and four paraprofessionals; all served pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students.

**Sampling Procedures**. According to Creswell (2014), the selection of participants is extremely important. It is strongly recommended that the selection be made based on knowledge and possible willingness to participate and openly contribute

(Creswell, 2014). Purposive sampling was used in this study. The research participants consisted of primary (kindergarten, first, and second grade) teachers. Three teachers were assigned to each grade level; thus, nine primary teachers were selected. Of the nine primary teachers, three groups were formed. Three kindergarten teachers comprised the survey group. Three first grade teachers comprised the interview group, and three second grade teachers comprised the focus group.

**Selection criteria.** All teachers in the school at the site of this study were required to participate in collaborative learning communities. Thus, the following criteria was established for the selection of teachers: (a) be currently certified to teach primary grades, (b) actively attend grade level collaborative sessions with fellow primary teachers, and (c) be considered proficient to exemplary in implementing strategies discussed in collaborative sessions.

**Instrumentation**

Instruments used in this study to collect data included: (a) Microsoft Forms, (b) interview protocol, (c) focus group protocol, and (d) NVIVO software. The instruments aided me tremendously. The protocols made the interview process and focus group discussion flow freely, and Microsoft Forms and NVIVO generated results expeditiously.

Microsoft Forms, an online program used to create surveys, enabled me to tailor the survey or align it with the study. It was user-friendly and permitted me to design the survey so the participants could be directed to a specific question based upon their responses. Each question required a direct response or an optional response. Responses were randomized, and the results were downloaded and analyzed. The Microforms software package also generated charts and graphs that depicted results. The software

also included provisions for further evaluation of the collected data, which could be
exported and downloaded.

An interview protocol was used in conducting the interviews. The focus group
sessions were also conducted using a protocol. The questions for the interview and focus
group sessions were aligned with the research questions.

A data coding program assisted me with coding and organizing the data collected.
Oliverira, Bitencourt, Teixeira, and Santos (2015) recommended the use of a coding
software and noted it could be valuable in providing a more in-depth analysis and in
uncovering a comprehensive level and connection of themes that were not detected
initially. NVIVO, a computer software program, was used in, storing, organizing,
categorizing, and analyzing the collected data. In the transcription phase, I manually
transcribed the interview and focus group data on a Surface Pro laptop. In the
categorizing and analytical process, the NVIVO software automatically sorted and
developed themes. The software program aided me in gathering the data in a meaningful
manner and in finding connections. Additionally, Microsoft forms aided me by
generating visuals that depicted the collected survey data and results.

**Process**

Permission to administer the study was requested initially from the district Board
of Education, then from the principal of the school selected at the site of this study.
When approval was granted from the Board of Education and principal at the targeted
school, the proposal was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at National
Louis University for review and clearance. Upon approval, I scheduled a meeting with
the principal at the elementary school at the chosen site for this study to obtain

permission to conduct the study, discuss selection criteria for the prospective participants, and to determine qualified personnel.

After meeting with the principal at the site of this study and receiving permission to conduct the study, I scheduled a meeting with the research participants to introduce myself to those who did not know me, explain the study, and answer questions. I emailed an information packet to the research participants. The information packet included: (a) in-depth information about the study; (b) methods of collecting data; (c) a form providing permission to participate in the study; (d) my contact information; and (e) written permission statements to be signed before participating in the study.

The participants were asked to provide their email address, which was entered in Microsoft Forms. I informed the qualified participants that the information obtained would be used in determining their perceptions of collaboration and its impact on development and growth. I asked them to submit the completed consent form and return it electronically to me within one week if they were interested in participating in the study. Upon receipt of the consent forms, I purposively selected the teachers for the three groups and scheduled meetings with the interview and focus group members to conduct the study. To strategically capture researcher thoughts, teacher dialogues and interactions, I developed a reflexive journal and made regular entries during the research process, including decisions and logistics.

**Survey Group**. I sent the website popup, a unique survey URL, to the research participants via school district internal mail. The URL was the link to Microsoft Form tools, the online survey. Instructions on how to use the tool were included. A ten-day window was established, and notification reminders were generated to keep the

respondents alert to the timeframe for completing the survey.

**Interview Group**.  The interview group was comprised of first-grade teachers. The interview session permitted me to: (a) explore research directly related to teacher collaboration efforts and administrative support, (b) synthesize results, and (c) identify areas that need further research.  During the interview, teachers were provided an opportunity to candidly share their opinions, views, and potential barriers.  The interview lasted approximately 45 minutes.

The approximate 45-minute semi-structured interview process consisted of open-ended questions based on the central research question explored: "What are the perceptions of primary teachers regarding key attributes of a grade-level collaborative session that fosters professional development?"  Member checking was conducted to ensure accuracy.  The interview was conducted by me.  I restated or summarized information and asked questions to determine accuracy.  The interview was audio-recorded using the Surface Pro laptop.  This method permitted me to make eye contact, observe gestures, and monitor the flow of conversation while capturing all comments. Open-ended questions were used to acquire more in-depth responses.  To acquire further information on specific responses, probing questions were used.  I emphasized that confidentiality would be assured.

The transcription process was completed in my home.  I used headphones.  The Surface Pro laptop used.  I shared a summary of the transcript of the interview with each participant within three weeks after the visit, via school district internal mail, and asked them to ensure accuracy of the transcript (Creswell, 2014).  None of the participants indicated corrections were needed, and I sent a note of thanks, via the school district

internal mail, to all participants for contributing to the study.  I also included a note

informing the participants that all files and recordings would be deleted upon completion

of the study, according to university policy and guidelines.  Next, I conducted an analysis

of data using NVIVO.

**Focus Group**.  With the three selected participants of the focus group (second

grade teachers), I conducted two 40-minute observations and one approximate 45-minute

audio recorded session using the Surface Pro laptop, asking open-ended questions based

on the research questions.  (See Appendices D and E for Observation Protocol and

Checklist).  Before the discussion, the focus group members were asked to complete a

five-minute survey about their credentials and collaborative experiences.  I conducted

member checks to ensure accuracy and understanding by restating or summarizing

information and asking questions to determine accuracy.  When necessary, I asked

probing questions, using follow-up questions that allowed for more in-depth responses.  I

reemphasized that confidentiality was assured.  The transcription process was completed

in my home.  I used headphones in this process.

Three weeks following the focus group meeting, I shared a summary of the

transcript with each participant via e-mail.  The participants were asked to review the

transcript for accuracy.  None of the participants indicated corrections were needed, and I

sent a note of thanks, via the school district internal mail, to all participants for

contributing to the study.  I also included a note informing the participants that all files

and recordings would be deleted upon completion of the study, according to university

policy and guidelines.  Next, I conducted an analysis of data using NVIVO.

**Methodological Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

**Methodological assumptions.** I selected the qualitative approach or method with several assumptions. The first assumption was that the qualitative method would be flexible. Another assumption was that it would support my relationship with the participants. The third assumption was that the qualitative approach would allow me to acquire further knowledge while examining the phenomenon. I also assumed that a greater understanding could be acquired as the research developed (Creswell, 2014).

**Limitations.** Limitations in a research study are considered impending flaws or weaknesses that are beyond my control (Creswell, 2014). Creswell (2013) noted that these impending weaknesses must be included in the study, because they can inhibit the depth of the study. Listed limitations also advise other researchers on how specific or general the results are and aide them in determining if the results can be applied to other studies (Creswell 2013). Several limitations applied to this study are outlined below.

**Limitation 1.** The sample size was a limitation to this study, as it consisted of one school in the same school district in the southeastern section of the United States.

**Limitation 2.** The lack of diversity in the selection of the participants was a limitation to this study. All participants were elementary school teachers selected from the district and school in which I was employed.

**Limitation 3.** The lack of diversity in collaborative training was a limitation to this study. The participants in this study were from the same school district and received the same training in collaborating.

**Limitation 4.** It is possible that the collected data would not be representative of the genuine views of the participants. Some participants may feel they were expected to

respond a certain way, even though they were told their responses would be confidential.

    **Delimitations.**    Delimitations narrow the span of the study. The following were identified delimitations of the study:

1. Participants were required to participate in weekly professional learning sessions based on district and schoolwide expectations.

2. This study was conducted in one school district in central section of a southern state in the United States.

3. Only primary teachers were asked to participate.

4. The confines set for this study included purposive sampling and small size, as only nine participants were included.

## Data Processing and Analysis

The responses from the survey, interview, and focus group session in this study were examined in attempt to answer the central research question: "What are the perceptions of primary teachers regarding key attributes of a grade-level collaborative session that fosters professional development?" and the following related questions:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the impact of collaboration on growth and development?

2. What perceptions are held by teachers on the use of collaboration to build collegiality?

3. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the benefits of grade level collaboration?

4. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the drawbacks of grade level collaboration?

Open-ended questions used in this study generated words, phrases, or complete sentence responses. Therefore, the amount of data collected from each question varied and were treated individually. The steps listed below recommended by Power and Renner (2003) were followed in analyzing the data collected from all sources used in this study. The NVIVO software was used to aid me in effectively analyzing the data, including developing themes, organizing, sorting, categorizing, and coding.

Step 1. I became familiar with the data. Responses were read several times. Doing so aided me in identifying recurrent words or phrases that were used to identify themes in the responses (Power and Renner, 2003, p. 6).

Step 2. I focused on the analysis. I reviewed the purpose of collecting the data, then sorted the data based on that purpose (Power and Renner, 2003, p. 6).

Powell and Renner (2003) advised focusing on the research questions, the period, or the event. For this study, I focused the analysis on responses to each open-ended question. If most of the responses were relatively brief, vague, or negative, the generated pattern or theme would more likely reveal teachers are not very satisfied using collaboration, or they did not believe the use of collaboration impacts professional growth and development.

Step 3. I categorized or sorted the collected data (Power and Renner, 2003, p. 6).

Powell and Renner (2003) concluded that sorting is the most essential step in conducting qualitative analyses. It requires much labor, but Powell and Renner (2003) contended it is the only way to accurately report the collected data. I used in vivo codes in organizing the data. It involved marking sections of data with symbols or a type of description, using names or phrases based on the actual language of the participants

(Creswell, 2007).

Step 4. I identified patterns and connections between and within themes from data

collected from the survey, interview, and focus group discussion (Power

and Renner, 2003, p. 6)

In the process of discovering themes, the NVIVO software identified important

teacher perceptions of collaboration. I asked the following questions, as posed by Powell

and Renner (2003):

1. What are the key ideas being expressed within each theme?

2. What are the similarities and differences in the way people responded,

including subtle variations?

3. How do things relate?  (Power and Renner, 2003, p. 6)

Once I developed the themes, I conducted a cross-case analysis.  I revised the

themes and wrote and interpreted a descriptive summary of the data.  I also used the

NVIVO software to identify and analyze isolated information (Power and Renner, 2003)

Step 5: I brought together all discoveries, listing the key points discovered from

the sorting of data and asking the following questions: "What are the

major lessons?" "What new things did I as a researcher learn?" "What will

those who use the results of the evaluation be more interested in

knowing?" (Powell & Renner, 2003).

Afterwards, an outline to report the data and diagrams to explain how the data

were analyzed was developed.  The steps outlined above were followed in examining the

responses to the open-ended questions on all data tools used in this study. They aided me

in drawing conclusions and in providing a complete interpretation of teachers'

perceptions about grade level collaboration and its impact on professional growth and development. Common threads were explored in the analyses of the survey, interviews, and focus group sessions. I analyzed responses to Question 1 to acquire an understanding of the participants' overall views about collaboration and its impact on professional development and growth. I analyzed responses to Question 2 to review the participants' perspectives on characteristics of effective grade level collaboration. I analyzed responses from Question 3 to grasp an understanding of the participants' perceptions on the benefits of grade level collaboration.

Content analysis was the method used when collecting the data from the focus, interview, and survey groups to develop categories. Every comment was read, and I noted the ideas discussed about grade level collaboration. The categories were created from the formation of units and identification of key words via the NVIVO software. The results were used to answer the overarching research question and related questions.

**Ethical Considerations**

Because human subjects were used in the data collection process, ethical considerations were incorporated to ensure credibility and accuracy of data. Throughout the study process, I (a) was truthful in the compilation process of the data, (b) honestly shared responses and findings, (c) gained early familiarity of participants, (d) used reflective commentary, (e) exuded an overall genuineness, and (f) was open and transparent with all participants. Background data were shared to establish context of study and detailed descriptions of the phenomenon of study to allow for comparisons to be made. While engaging in the study, ethical practices were adhered in efforts to support the validity of the project. Practices were consistent, and fairness was conveyed

amongst all participants. Specifically, the perceptions of the participants were captured. Even though the participants were purposively selected, they were provided an opportunity to volunteer under no coercion. The consent forms were locked up for security and confidentiality purposes. Data collected in Micosoft Forms were stored in the subscriber's password-protected survey area on the website. After the survey was closed, results from the data collected were extracted and saved in a secured file (password-protected) on my computer.

Creswell (2014) stated that coercion may knowingly or unknowingly occur through comments or gestures in the interview or focus group process. Therefore, during the interview process, careful attention was given when reframing and probing to ensure that coercion was nonexistent. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by me, using a Surface Pro laptop.

**Confidentiality**

To ensure confidentiality, I shared the summary of the interviews only with the participants interviewed and the summary of the focus group discussions only with focus group members within three weeks after the visit. The participants' names were not used in the study. All participants were assigned a pseudonym that was used for identification. This was done to protect the ideas and perspectives of the participants. The recording was manually converted to text, and all names were removed and replaced with the participant identifier.

Collected consent forms and coding sheets were filed separately and stored in a locked file cabinet. I was the keyholder for the file cabinet. The filing cabinet was housed in my home office.

Survey data was managed through Microsoft Forms, which is password-protected, with me being the only individual with access to the data. Upon completion of the study, I retrieved data from Microsoft Forms and placed it on a flash drive, which was placed in a locked file cabinet in my office, along with other documents about the study.

Interview and focus group data were archived and filed separately in a locked file cabinet in my office. All flash drives were labeled with the date, the school's pseudonym, duration of the interviews, and focus group discussion. They were also stored in a locked file cabinet in my office. Backup copies of all transcripts were stored on a flash drive and placed in a locked file cabinet in my office, accessible to me only. All data would be kept for three years, or within the time frame established by the university, then shredded or destroyed.

**Trustworthiness**

To maintain high trustworthiness in this qualitative study, criteria to ensure valid interpretation of data included: (a) credibility; (b) transferability; (c) dependability; and (d) confirmability (Creswell, 2014). The use of multiple groups of participants with experience in collaborating, combined with various methods of collecting the data increased credibility in conclusions drawn in the study. In the transferability process, other researchers should be able to apply the findings of this study to their study, or to other studies. A study is considered to have dependability when its findings remain steady over time. Because this study was conducted in only one elementary school in one school district in the southeastern United States, it is not clear if the findings would remain steady over time. A study is considered to have confirmability if the findings and recommendations are consistent with the information contained in the study. Highly

skilled individuals in the implementation of collaboration analyzed the study to check for consistency.

Member checking was used to increase the reliability of the data, as each participant was provided an opportunity to confirm credibility and accuracy. Creswell (2014) contended this must be done to ensure accuracy. It was also used to validate transcribed information. Interviewed participants were asked to review a summary of the transcript of the interview to ensure accuracy. Focus group members were also be asked to review a summary of the transcript of the focus group discussion to ensure accuracy (Creswell, 2014).

**Potential Researcher Bias**

Collaboration was the chosen initiative to improve instruction in the school district in which this study was conducted and in which I was employed. As an academic coach, I believe the implementation of grade level collaboration is an effective strategy in improving student achievement. However, I am not in total agreement with the mandate associated with its incorporation regarding the length of time allocated for grade-level collaboration and the omission of soft skills training. To manage this bias, I created an environment which promoted grade-level collaboration to the ultimate level. The questions were structured in a manner that ensured no bias in terms of time restraints centered around collaboration, and no one question was structured to influence the next.

The participants may have preferred a different strategy than collaboration, or may have believed a different strategy was better; however, to show loyalty to the district and to the research study, they may have felt prompted to comment more

positively rather than negatively. In efforts to manage this bias, I encouraged the participants to give their honest views. Additionally, if the participants believed the procedures established by the school district in implementing required collaboration were to the extreme and not entirely necessary, even though their students may have demonstrated improvement by means of grade-level collaboration, their comments may have been skewed.

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**RESULTS**

In this chapter, I am presenting a restatement of the purpose of the study. I am also presenting descriptive data and an analysis of responses from the survey, focus group session, and face-to-face interview sessions with primary school teachers. Additionally, I presented results related to the research questions and a summary of the results.

**Restatement of the Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' attitudes, experiences, and beliefs regarding the impact of primary grade level collaboration on professional development to strengthen instructional practice leading to higher student achievement. Research revealed teacher collaboration is vital to the teaching and learning process (The Wing Institute, 2019). Research also revealed that established collaborative groups and teacher teams are indications of improved school and student achievement (Marzano, 2013). Thus, I sought to examine teachers' attitudes, experiences, and beliefs regarding the impact of primary grade level collaboration on professional development to strengthen instructional practice leading to higher student achievement.

I used responses from the survey, focus group session, and interviews to answer the central research question: "What are the perceptions of primary teachers regarding key attributes of a grade-level collaborative session that fosters professional development?" Responses to the related questions that aided in answering the central question are listed below.

1. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the impact of collaboration on growth and development?

2. What perceptions are held by teachers on the use of collaboration to build collegiality?

3. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the benefits of grade level collaboration?

4. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the drawbacks of grade level collaboration?

## Description of Participants

Using purposive sampling, I recruited nine primary grade-level teachers from one inner-city elementary school to participate in this phenomenological qualitative study. The selected participants were employed in an inner-city elementary school assigned to teach at the primary grade level, which includes: (a) kindergarten, (b) first grade, and (c) second grade. Three of the selected participants taught kindergarten, three taught first grade, and three taught second grade. All were certified to teach primary grades, were actively participating in grade-level collaborative sessions with their peers and were deemed at least proficient in applying strategies discussed in the sessions.

### Demographics

To acquire a vast understanding of the participants' demographics, I collected data from three groups: (a) survey group, (b) interview group, and (c) focus group. The demographic data included: (a) race, (b) gender, (c) age range, and (d) participant in grade-level collaboration. Demographic descriptive data on the participants are depicted in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

**Survey Group**

The survey group was comprised of kindergarten teachers. Participant 1 was Caucasian, Participant 2 was African American, and Participant 3 was African American. All were female. The age range was from 25 to 39.

**Interview Group**

The interview group was comprised of first-grade teachers. Participant 1 was African American. Participant 2 was African American, and Participant 3 was African American. All were female. The age range was from 27 to 33.

**Focus Group**

The focus group was comprised of second-grade teachers. Participant 1 was Caucasian. Participant 2 was African American, and Participant 3 was African American. All were female. The age range was from 32 to 38. Demographic data on the participants are outlined in Tables 3, 4, and 5.

Table 3

Survey Group Demographics

| Participant | Race | Gender | Age Range | Participant in Grade Level Collaboration |
|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| 1 | Caucasian | Female | 25-39 | Yes |
| 2 | African American | Female | 25-39 | Yes |
| 3 | African American | Female | 25-39 | Yes |

Table 4

Interview Group Demographics

| Participant | Race | Gender | Age Range | Participant in Grade Level Collaboration |
|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| 1 | Caucasian | Female | 27-33 | Yes |
| 2 | African American | Female | 27-33 | Yes |
| 3 | African American | Female | 27-33 | Yes |

Table 5

Focus Group Demographics

| Participant | Race | Gender | Age Range | Participant in Grade Level Collaboration |
|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| 1 | Caucasian | Female | 32-38 | Yes |
| 2 | African American | Female | 32-38 | Yes |
| 3 | African American | Female | 32-38 | Yes |

**Instruments**

I used four instruments to collect data: (a) Microsoft Forms, (b) interview protocol, (c) focus group protocol, and (d) survey. The interview questions were open-ended; the focus group questions were closed-ended. I used Microsoft Forms to create the closed-ended question survey and Microsoft Excel and NVIVO Software to organize, categorize, and analyze the data.

**Procedures**

I requested permission, and it was granted by the Board of Education of the selected Southern state school district and the principal of the selected school to conduct this study. I then submitted the proposal to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at National Louis University for review and clearance. Upon approval, I scheduled a meeting with the principal at the elementary school at the chosen site for this study and obtained permission to conduct the study. I also discussed selection criteria for the prospective participants and how to determine qualified personnel.

After meeting with the principal at the site of this study and receiving permission to conduct the study, I scheduled an introductory meeting with primary grade-level teachers. At the meeting, I explained the study, answered questions, and requested email addresses of those who were interested in participating in the study. Next, I emailed an information packet, which included a consent form, to those who had expressed an interest in participating in the study and provided their email address. Upon receipt of the consent forms, I purposively selected the participants for the three groups. In preparing for the data collection phase, I emailed the URL to the survey, with instructions, to the three purposively selected participants assigned to that group. Next, I scheduled individual interviews with the three purposively selected participants assigned to the interview group. I also scheduled a recorded session with the three purposively selected participants assigned to the focus group.

**Data Collection**

I collected data to acquire an understanding of the perceptions of teachers regarding their experiences in grade-level collaborative sessions. The following were

sources from which I collected data: (a) consent forms, (b) surveys, (c) interviews and (d) focus group sessions.  I also collected data from my notes.

**Data Analysis**

I manually transcribed the interview and focus group sessions.  Next, I followed the steps in analyzing qualitative data by Power and Renner (2003), using NVIVO data analysis software to analyze the data.  I imported the transcribed data into NVIVO and examined it to answer the central research question: "What are the perceptions of primary teachers regarding key attributes of a grade-level collaborative session that fosters professional development?"

I collected data on the four semi-structured questions separately and used the coding function of NVIVO software to reveal words that were frequently used by the participants.  I also used the software to cross-check the words in each response to each answer.  The responses to all questions were similar as commonalities were reflected in the participants' responses.  I used Microsoft Excel and NVIVO software to organize and sort the data.  In organizing and sorting the data, I was able to identify common words and themes.  Next, I used the NVIVO software to identify patterns and links within and between themes from data collected from each interview.  I used NVIVO software to record the findings and major themes discovered in the organizing and sorting process. Finally, in interpreting the collected data and reviewing the themes, I drew conclusions regarding the analysis on primary teachers' perceptions about key attributes of a grade-level collaborative session that fosters professional development.

I thoroughly analyzed responses from all participants regarding their beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and experiences on grade-level collaboration for developing themes.  I

collected the response data from the survey, interviews, and a focus group session. I also presented a summary of the survey responses and selected interview and focus group participants' dialogs in the form of direct quotations. Additionally, I aligned specific responses with each research question for the interview and focus group sessions.

## Presentation of the Results

### Survey Results

I used the first six questions in the survey to examine the participants' shared beliefs, values, and vision regarding grade-level collaboration. Sixty-seven percent strongly agreed that the image of their role had changed when mandatory grade-level collaboration was initially implemented. Thirty-three percent were neutral. Sixty-seven percent strongly agreed that the primary grade level had established short-term measurable goals. Thirty-three percent agreed. Thirty-three percent strongly agreed that the school-wide goals and objectives for student learning were related to their school vision. Sixty-seven percent agreed. Sixty-seven percent agreed that a teacher-leadership team was in place and assisted the school in increasing and sharing common beliefs and values. Thirty-three percent agreed. Sixty-seven percent strongly agreed that a set of generic values were created by their grade-level teachers and that they were shared by the teachers assigned to that grade level. Thirty-three percent strongly agreed that their school's vision established a measurable student academic goal. Sixty-seven percent agreed.

I asked the survey participants about collective learning. Thirty-three percent strongly agreed that they frequently measure the effectiveness of classroom practice with formative assessments. Sixty-seven percent agreed. Thirty-three percent strongly agreed

that common assessments were created to assess student learning and achievement during grade-level collaboration.  Sixty-seven percent agreed.  Thirty-three percent strongly agreed that the grade-level team frequently engaged in professional dialogue.  Sixty-seven percent agreed.  Thirty-three percent agreed that open dialogue was valued among the grade-level team.  Sixty-seven percent agreed.  Thirty-three percent strongly agreed that the grade-level team was comfortable with discussing data.  Sixty-seven percent agreed.  Sixty-seven percent strongly agreed that student data were frequently collected and discussed at grade-level meetings.  Thirty-three percent agreed.  Sixty-seven percent strongly agreed that grade-level planning led to improved student learning.

I asked the survey participants about supportive conditions.  Thirty-three percent strongly agreed that the school was given professional development in collaboration.  Sixty-seven percent agreed.  Thirty-three percent strongly agreed that collaboration was strategic, based on data, and uses action research.  Sixty-seven percent agreed.  One hundred percent agreed that fellow grade-level teachers mentored and coached one another and were provided the necessary resources.  Thirty-three percent strongly agreed that norms established by grade-level teams were strictly adhered.  Sixty-seven percent agreed.  Sixty-seven percent strongly agreed that time was allocated for teacher collaboration.  Thirty-three percent agreed.  Thirty-three percent strongly agreed that professional learning opportunities and resources were available to support teacher development and growth.  Sixty-seven percent agreed.

The survey results revealed positive responses from all participants.  All responses yielded either 67% strongly in agreement and 33% in agreement, or 33% strongly in agreement and 67% in agreement.  Of the 19 questions, seven yielded the

33% strongly agreed.  Thirty-three percent of the primary teachers strongly agreed on high expectations for student achievement in the future.  That same percent strongly agreed that classroom practices were monitored frequently and that they frequently participated in professional dialogs.  Thirty-three percent also strongly agreed that they were comfortable in discussing data and that they were provided professional development experiences.  Additionally, 33% strongly agreed that collaboration was strategic, norms were established, and professional learning opportunities were available.  None disagreed or strongly disagreed on any question.  One hundred percent of the participants agreed that grade-level collaboration provided opportunities for fellow colleagues to mentor and coach one another.  One hundred percent also agreed that they were provided necessary resources.

**Interview Results**

I scheduled individual interviews with the three selected participants.  I conducted the 50-minute recorded interview sessions in a reserved room at the site of the study to avoid confidentiality violations.  I organized the responses as outlined below.

**Research Question 1.  What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the impact of collaboration on growth and development?**  My goal for this question was to examine how primary teachers feel grade-level collaboration influences their professional development and growth.

**Impact on professional development.**  I asked the participants if they believed participating in the collaborative sessions helped them grow and develop more in their professional endeavors.  All participants responded that the grade-level collaborative sessions helped them grow and develop more professionally.  Participant A responded,

"Yes they do.  These sessions help all us to plan instructional lessons together, share ideas, brainstorm resources, and discover new things" (Personal communication, February 18, 2020).  Participant B responded, "Yes. Collaborative sessions do help.  It definitely makes our workload more manageable.  It also minimizes our stress levels by having someone to lean on for support in addition to the academic coach" (Personal communication, February 18, 2020).  Participant C responded, "Yes.  These group collaborative sessions are helpful.  It helps to ensure that we are teaching our students quality instruction.  We balance one another out, and also challenge one another's thoughts" (Personal communication, February 18, 2020).

**Stories about the impact of grade-level collaboration on professional development.**  I asked the participants to share specific stories regarding how grade-level collaboration can impact professional development.  Participant A responded:

Yes. I left a K-2 Phonics professional development session completely clueless about the content of the session or how I would redeliver these expectations to my students.  We broke it down step-by-step during grade level collaboration, and my team members helped me to map out a plan and understand the expectations completely. (Personal communication, February 18, 2020)

Participant B responded:

Yes. I was having a hard time with a particular student in my classroom. We'd gained a resource kit filled with strategies to curtail unwanted behaviors. I could not get any of them to work for me.  Clearly, my approach was all wrong.  During collaboration, my teammate and I were acting as the students, and the final team member was the teacher.  She modeled for me how to effectively convey the

expectation to students. (Personal communication, February 18, 2020)

Participant C responded, "It simply makes me a more complete and well- rounded teacher.  It touches on teaching strategies, classroom management, parental involvement, effective communication skills, conflict resolution, and how to exude professionalism at all times" (Personal communication, February 18, 2020).  The interview participants expressed that they were positively impacted by grade-level collaboration, especially in classroom management and teaching strategies.  They also expressed that it helped them grow professionally.

**Research Question 2.  What perceptions are held by teachers on the use of collaboration to build collegiality?**  My goal for this question was to examine the participants feelings, beliefs, and experiences regarding the use of collaboration to encourage connectedness in working with their colleagues.  I asked the participants several questions regarding the use of collaboration to build collegiality.

**Collegiality defined.**  I asked the participants to define collegiality.  Participant A responded, "Teachers working together and learning from one another" (Personal communication, February 18, 2020).  Participant B responded, "Colleagues sharing the workload" (Personal communication, February 18, 2020).  Participant C responded, "The coming together of professionals and providing opportunities to learn with and from one another" (Personal communication, February 18, 2020).

**Experiences in working collaboratively.**  Participant A responded, "We support one another, pull from one another's strengths and build on one another's' knowledge." Participant B responded, "We often have different viewpoints, we compromise, we have the ability to come to a common ground" (Personal communication, February 18, 2020).

Participant C responded, "Our workload is heavy, so we distribute the workload evenly. We are fair in distributing our work assignments (Personal communication, February 18, 2020).

**What the participants liked most about working collaboratively.** I asked the participants what they liked most about working collaboratively with their colleagues. Participant A responded:

> We have the ability to be genuine and authentic with one another. We can be vulnerable and not feel pressured to have all the answers. If I'm having a rough day with the students, I look forward to this time to breathe and get a positive word of encouragement from my team members. They have the ability to refocus me immediately. (Personal communication, February 18, 2020)

Participant B responded, "We build off one another. It's as if we are the pieces to effectively complete a jigsaw puzzle. We each fill in the gaps in areas that we're lacking and strengthen each other to be strong as one" (Personal communication, February 18, 2020). Participant C responded, "They accept me for who I am. Even though I have the least amount of experience, they view me as an equal. My input holds just as much weight as the other team members, it's even across the board" (Personal communication, February 18, 2020). The interview participants expressed that grade-level collaboration is a time to get to know team members, to help one another, and provide input.

**Research Question 3. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the benefits of grade level collaboration?** My goal for this question was to examine the beliefs, feelings, experiences, and attitudes of primary teachers regarding advantages or gains associated with grade-level collaboration. I asked the participants two questions

regarding the benefits of grade-level collaboration regarding their instruction and their students.

**Impact of grade-level collaboration on instruction.** I asked the participants if they believed their instruction had improved because they had participated in grade-level collaboration. Participant A responded, "Yes, this is when it's really important to build off of one another, throw ideas out and weed through them to determine the best approach or combination of approaches to best meet the needs of our students" (Personal communication, February 18, 2020). Participant B responded, "Yes, I am the first to admit that I am still working to master the craft of teaching, and I have a long way to go. Learning from others always offers an advantage" (Personal communication, February 18, 2020). Participant C responded, "Absolutely. Three minds working together is far more powerful than one mind spinning its wheels to come to a sound conclusion. Why not hash it out with others and possibly capitalize on and enhance your idea. (Personal communication, February 18, 2020). The interview participants expressed that grade-level collaboration has a positive affect on them. It provided opportunities to learn their colleagues' areas of expertise and gather ideas they could use to improve student performance.

**Impact of grade-level collaboration on student achievement.** I asked the participants if their students experienced any gains because of the incorporation of strategies learned in collaborative sessions. Participant A responded:

> Yes, we received intensive training in the area of Guided Reading. We learned
>
> the importance and value of delivering instruction to students on their
>
> independent level. We also learned the importance of and how to deliver

instruction to our students that is tailored specifically to students' individual needs and proficiency level." (Personal communication, February 18, 2020)

Participant B responded:

We had intensive training in The Readers and Writers Workshop Models. Adhering to this model has allowed my students to identify their independent reading level, select text that is on or near their reading level, demonstrate knowledge of text comprehension, all while engaging in a systematic flow during our reading block. My students no longer view writing as the enemy, rather, a way to express themselves. (Personal communication, February 18, 2020)

Participant C responded:

I love implementing the Math Workshop Model. It encompasses direct instruction, independent practice, and computer assisted instruction. My students are able to receive guided instruction from the teacher focusing either on a new skill or a skill needing additional practice. The intimacy of learning within a small group is key for students experiencing skill or process misconceptions. (Personal communication, February 18, 2020)

The interview participants expressed that grade-level collaboration benefitted them greatly, especially the training sessions. They expressed how student learning improved when they implemented what they had learned in some of the training sessions.

**Research Question 4. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the drawbacks of grade level collaboration**? My goal for this question was to examine the feelings, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences regarding disadvantages or issues with grade-level collaboration.

**Most common issue with grade-level collaboration.** Participant A responded, "Being able to stay on task and agree on which ideas appropriately address the task at hand and which do not" (Personal communication, February 18, 2020). Participant B responded, "We lack ample time to plan effectively. By the time we drop our students off at connections class, return to the classroom, be seated, and begin planning, we actually have 40 minutes or so to plan daily" (Personal communication, February 18, 2020). Participant C responded, "The ability to minimize distractions is sometimes taxing. Parents are calling or stopping by, professional development classes occur, and assemblies and other programs can sometimes pose a barrier" (Personal communication, February 18, 2020).

**Dislike most about working collaboratively.** Participant A responded, "I have no dislikes regarding working with my team members at this time." Participant B responded, "I consider it a plus to be on a team. I have not disliked any aspect of collaborative planning" (Personal communication, February 18, 2020). Participant C responded, "I am thankful to have the constant support and guidance from teachers I can trust. I have no dislikes concerning working collaboratively" (Personal communication, February 18, 2020). The interview participants expressed no major drawbacks. However, they did express concern over not being able to use 100% of the time allocated for grade-level collaboration.

**Focus Group Results**

I scheduled the focus group session with the selected participants. I conducted the session in a reserved room to avoid confidentiality violations. The recorded session lasted approximately 45 minutes. I organized the responses as outlined below.

**School leaders' expectations regarding effective teaching.** The school district at the site of the study used the framework for effective teaching as defined by Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2004). I asked the participants if school leaders have expectations that mirror effective teaching. Participant A responded:

> Yes. Although there are many different ways to **teach** effectively; good instructors have several qualities in common. They are prepared, set clear and fair expectations, have a positive attitude, are patient with students, and assess their **teaching** on a regular basis. (Personal communication, February 25, 2020)

Participant B responded, "Yes. We are expected to follow the district's teaching expectations. We are given teaching guidelines, protocols, and specific standards which should be taught for each grade level. We are also evaluated by those district expectations" (Personal communication, February 25, 2020). Participant C responded:

> Yes. The expectation is that we collaborate with our grade level on a daily basis to arrive at best teaching practices for the students we serve. The collaborative planning protocol from the district lays out the detailed expectations of teachers: What we are to teach, how to break it down for the students, how to assess students' understanding, and how to reteach if needed. (Personal communication, February 25, 2020)

**Evaluator of effective teaching.** I asked the participants who defines effective teaching. Participant A responded, "I think the students are the major determiners of what effective teaching is. Their mastery or lack of suggests whether or not effective teaching has occurred. **Effective teaching** is the ability to improve student achievement as shown by research (Personal communication, February 25, 2020). Participant B

responded:

> The State of Study Department of Education determines effective teaching by an evaluative tool call Ed K Evaluation System. The Ed K Effectiveness System (EKES) is a common evaluation system designed for building teacher effectiveness and ensuring consistency and comparability throughout the state. The Ed K Effectiveness System (EKES) consists of three components which provide multiple sources of data. The three components are Teacher Assessment on Performance Standards (TAPS), Professional Growth, and Student Growth. The overarching goal of EKES is to support continuous growth and development of each teacher. (Personal communication, February 25, 2020)

Participant C responded:

> The district's expectations are strategically aligned to the state's expectations. We are evaluated accordingly. Then, the parents' feedback also serves as a good indicator of teacher effectiveness. Parents are able to express their support or lack of, and it's generally based on their child's performance and growth as well as feedback given to the parent from the student regarding their perception of the teacher. (Personal communication, February 25, 2020)

**Method of communicating expectations.** I asked the participants how expectations are presented. Participant A responded:

> Teachers engage in a pre-conference, mid-year conference as well as an end of the year conference. It's during these times that school leaders share the evaluation instrument that will be used to evaluate teachers' performance throughout the year. They explain that this process is cumulative and not a one-time evaluation.

There are opportunities to improve upon teacher ratings throughout the year.

(Personal communication, February 25, 2020)

Participant B responded:

We have conferences throughout the year that allow for detailed conversation to

occur based on what the teaching expectations will be, what professional

development will occur, what amount of growth is expected for students, how to

exude professionalism, and that collaborative planning with grade levels both

horizontally and vertically is the expectation.  (Personal communication, February

25, 2020)

Participant C responded:

Upon initial hiring, the criteria for effective teaching was shared with me.

Following the hiring, I sat with the principal to review the Teacher Keys

Effectiveness System.  I was presented with a checklist of things that I would be

expected to do on a continuous basis and do so with efficiency. (Personal

communication, February 25, 2020)

**Support for teachers regarding expectations.**  I asked the participants who is

designated to answer questions regarding expectations for grade-level collaboration.

Participant A responded, "Principal, assistant principal, academic coach, mentor,

teachers, teachers on their team with experience" (Personal communication, February 25,

2020).  Participant C responded, "Experienced colleagues, school leaders, district

officials" (Personal communication, February 25, 2020).

**Evaluation.**  I asked the participants if school leaders were using the expectations

rubric to evaluate grade-level collaboration.  Participant A responded, "Yes and with

fairness and consistency (Personal communication, February 25, 2020). Participant B responded, "Absolutely, this effective teaching instrument levels the playing field for teachers" (Personal communication, February 25, 2020). Participant C responded, "Yes, the evaluation system provides clear expectations for teachers and clearly share how evaluators are to assess teacher performance. It minimizes the ability to infuse personal opinion. It requires evaluators to focus on the rubric given to them" (Personal communication, February 25, 2020).

**School leaders' role in improving instructional practice.** I asked the participants what school leaders do to help teachers improve instructional practice. Participant A responded:

We have frequent professional learning sessions, daily support from our academic coach. They are committed to: Building and sustaining a school vision, sharing leadership leading a learning community, using data to make instructional decisions, monitoring curriculum and instruction, sharing leadership, leading a learning community, using data to make instructional decisions, and monitoring curriculum and instruction. (Personal communication, February 25, 2020)

Participant B responded:

They provide uninterrupted time for collaboration amongst grade level teachers, provide professional literature to read with instructional best practices, and our leadership receives suggestions well from the teachers on how we could make learning most effective for the students we serve. (Personal communication, February 25, 2020)

Participant C responded:

> They allow us to digest the new information or expectations, allow us to practice
> and become comfortable, observe the practice in our classrooms, provide
> feedback for improvement, and check back in with us to see if the feedback has
> been implemented and if further support is required. (Personal communication,
> February 25, 2020)

I asked the participants what they needed from school leaders to help them improve instruction.  Participant A responded:

> Consistency, clear expectations, listen to the requests of the teachers, provide a
> wealth of resources and on-going professional development based on the school's
> specific needs and the students we serve, not a cookie cutter approach that has
> worked for others.  Tailor our efforts specifically to the needs of our population.
> **Take small steps:** Also, realize that learning is incremental, and it takes time to
> change practice.  To make lasting change, support teachers with the time,
> resources, and coaching they need as they transfer new learning into their daily
> routines. **Supportive answerability:** Teachers, like any professionals, need to be
> held responsible for results AND they must be provided with the time and
> resources to accomplish meaningful change.  (Personal communication, February
> 25, 2020)

Participant B responded:

> To ensure that all teachers have a voice in the school and allow that voice to
> evolve over time as teachers learn what they have to offer.  Teachers exhibit
> leadership in multiple, sometimes overlapping, ways.  Some leadership roles are

formal with designated responsibilities. Other more informal roles emerge as teachers interact with their peers. The variety of roles ensures that teachers can find ways to lead that fit their talents and interests. (Personal communication, February 25, 2020)

**Research Question 1. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the impact of collaboration on growth and development?** My goal for this question was to examine primary teachers' feelings about how grade-level collaboration influences growth and development. The participants' focus was on their students as they reflected on the impact of strategies learned in grade-level collaboration that were applied in the classroom.

**Implementation of current strategies**. I asked the participants if current strategies were being implemented effectively. Participant A responded, "Well, student growth is moving at a slow pace, but I feel wholeheartedly that teachers are implementing current strategies effectively" (Personal communication, February 25, 2020). Participant B responded, "We collaborate intensely to ensure that we have a firm understanding of how and why strategies should be implemented in a particular way" (Personal communication, February 25, 2020). Participant C responded, "Yes, students are making gains at a slow rate; nevertheless, they are improving. This tells us that teaching strategies implemented correctly and with fidelity are indeed impactful and support student achievement" (Personal communication, February 25, 2020). The focus group participants expressed that even though student growth was slow but gradual, they indicated that their students were improving, as a result of strategies learned in grade-level collaboration that they applied in the lessons.

**Research Question 2**. **What perceptions are held by teachers on the use of collaboration to build collegiality?** My goal for this question was to examine the participants' feelings, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences regarding the use of collaboration to encourage connectedness in working with their colleagues. I asked the participants several questions regarding the use of collaboration to build collegiality. All participants expressed that grade-level collaboration afforded them opportunities to connect with their colleagues and build relationships. Collaboration time was the time the participants expressed they had during the school day to get to know fellow colleagues. During this time, teachers learn one another's strengths and use them to share teaching techniques and discuss ways to help students be successful. As a general question at the end of the focus group session, I asked the participants what teachers need from school leaders to improve their instructional practice. Participant B addressed collegiality and responded:

> **Collegial support:** Provide teachers with both a space to collaborate with peers around formative assessment practices and the time to meet with them. This gives teachers opportunities to develop personal action plans, report back to a peer group about the result of implementing those plans and reflect and receive feedback from colleagues who are addressing similar challenges. (Personal communication, February 25, 2020)

Participant C responded**, "Elicit Responsiveness**: learning is incremental, and it takes time to change practice. To make lasting change, support teachers with the time, resources, and coaching they need as they transfer learning into their daily routines" (Personal communication, February 25, 2020). The focus group participants expressed

they enjoyed having the opportunity to connect with fellow professionals, to support one another, and learn the strengths of their peers.

**Research Question 3.  What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the benefits of grade level collaboration?**  My goal of this question was to examine the beliefs, feelings, experiences, and attitudes of the participants regarding achievements linked to grade-level collaboration.  The participants felt that grade-level collaboration was extremely helpful.  Collaboration, according to the participants, was extremely helpful because it provided a special time to plan together, learn new strategies, and discuss related issues.

**Opportunities for collaboration.**  I asked the participants about provisions for collaboration.  Participant A responded:

> To facilitate teacher efforts, we have a daily schedule that provides consistency and direction for the teachers.  We collaborate daily at a designated time.  Our students are attending extra-curricular classes for 50 minutes each day and we plan during that time.  (Personal communication, February 25, 2020).  As a support, we are happy to have uninterrupted time carved out in our daily schedule to plan and collaborate.  Daily grade level collaboration is the expectation.  Collaboration time is truly one of the highlights of my day.  Outside of working with my students, it is the best part of the teaching experience.  (Personal communication, February 25, 2020)

Participant C responded, "We collaborate daily in our grade level chairperson's classroom.  All members' perspectives are valued and encouraged throughout the process. We make the experience relaxing and all inclusive" (Personal communication,

February 25, 2020). The focus group participants expressed that grade-level collaboration is tremendously helpful. They also expressed that the feeling that all were valued was very encouraging.

**Research Question 4. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the drawbacks of grade level collaboration?** My goal for this question was to examine the feelings, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences regarding disadvantages or issues with grade-level collaboration. I asked the participants about procedures in place that either facilitate or detract from productive collaboration. Participant A responded:

> The only detraction I've experienced is unannounced visitors coming to present to the teachers when we've prepared to collaborate amongst one another. However, what detracts from the session are interruptions from the front office stating that parents are in the building and want us to come down to an unannounced conference. Parent meeting scheduling is critical to aid in preserving this time for teachers. (Personal communication, February 25, 2020)

**Qualities of successful teams.** I asked the participants if they felt some teams were more successful than others, and if so, I asked them to state their beliefs as to the reason. Participant A responded, "Yes. They come to school with the sole purpose of increasing student achievement on their minds. They commit themselves to the work and refuse to allow egos or distractions to alter the meeting" (Personal communication, February 25, 2020). Participant B responded, "Yes, I'm sure there are. They may have been working together for a period of time and have a good understanding of how one another operates. They also may have a mutual level of respect for one another" (Personal communication, February 25, 2020). Participant C responded:

Absolutely. The successful teams have team norms and respect them. They come

to planning prepared to work. They are invested in student growth and

achievement and are serious about improving teaching practices. These teams

know that the highest indicator of student achievement is good teaching.

(Personal communication, February 25, 2020)

The only drawback expressed by the focus group members was that of time. They felt

that they do not have enough time to collaborate because of the duty to escort their

students to another classroom before collaborating.

**Thematic Analysis**

I followed the steps for analyzing the data outlined by Power and Renner (2003)

in conjunction with the use of NVIVO software. The first step I took involved a thematic

data analysis of the survey, interview, and focus group session responses. NVIVO

highlighted words, phrases, sentences, and important paragraphs that would address the

research question. Tables 4 and 5 show the common or frequently used words and count

from the interview and focus group sessions.

Table 6

Word Count Extracted from Interview Sessions: Primary Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Grade-Level Collaboration

| Word | Length | Count | Weighted Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| students | 8 | 13 | 2.73 |
| another | 7 | 9 | 1.89 |
| instruction | 11 | 6 | 1.26 |
| level | 5 | 6 | 1.26 |
| team | 4 | 6 | 1.26 |
| time | 4 | 5 | 1.05 |
| working | 7 | 5 | 1.05 |
| ability | 7 | 4 | 0.84 |
| members | 7 | 4 | 0.84 |
| plan | 4 | 4 | 0.84 |
| reading | 7 | 4 | 0.84 |
| together | 8 | 4 | 0.84 |
| work | 4 | 4 | 0.84 |
| also | 4 | 3 | 0.63 |
| approach | 8 | 3 | 0.63 |
| build | 5 | 3 | 0.63 |
| classroom | 9 | 3 | 0.63 |
| collaboration | 13 | 3 | 0.63 |
| collaborative | 13 | 3 | 0.63 |
| effectively | 11 | 3 | 0.63 |

Table 7

Word Count Extracted from Focus Group Session: Primary Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Grade-Level Collaboration

| Word | Length | Count | Weighted Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| teachers | 8 | 26 | 3.06 |
| teaching | 8 | 17 | 2.00 |
| time | 4 | 16 | 1.88 |
| teacher | 7 | 15 | 1.76 |
| learning | 8 | 11 | 1.29 |
| students | 8 | 11 | 1.29 |
| daily | 5 | 10 | 1.18 |
| expectations | 12 | 10 | 1.18 |
| student | 7 | 9 | 1.06 |
| support | 7 | 9 | 1.06 |
| make | 4 | 8 | 0.94 |
| school | 6 | 8 | 0.94 |
| collaborate | 11 | 7 | 0.82 |
| effective | 9 | 7 | 0.82 |
| growth | 6 | 7 | 0.82 |
| provide | 7 | 7 | 0.82 |
| grade | 5 | 6 | 0.71 |
| leadership | 10 | 6 | 0.71 |
| level | 5 | 6 | 0.71 |
| system | 6 | 6 | 0.71 |

For the interviews, I separated the highlighted data in NVIVO into two codes: (a) collaborative and (b) grade-level. The five emerging themes were: (a) collaborative planning, (b) collaborative sessions, (c) grade-level collaboration, (d) group collaborative sessions, and (e) professional development session. (See Appendix, Table I8 for the list of themes and the associated quotes by the interviewees.)

**Theme 1. Collaborative planning.** All participants indicated that collaborative planning was mandated but had found it to be well structured. They expressed that it was

a great learning experience as they not only planned their lessons, they learned how to assess student learning. They also learned student growth expectations and how to be professional.

**Theme 2. Collaborative sessions.** The primary teachers expressed that the collaborative sessions were quite beneficial. They indicated that the support received from fellow colleagues was major. They also indicated that the sessions helped them manage their workload.

**Theme 3. Grade-level collaboration.** The primary teachers indicated that grade-level collaboration was extremely helpful. One teacher expressed that the instructional planning aspect was most helpful. Another teacher alluded to the importance of building off one another and combining approaches or strategies.

**Theme 4. Group collaborative sessions.** The primary teachers expressed that the collaborative sessions were helpful and that they aid in providing quality instruction to the students. Regarding the varied levels, experiences, and thought processes of each teacher, one teacher noted that the sessions allowed for complementary experiences wherein they "balance one another out and challenge one another's thoughts" (Personal communication, February 18, 2020). She also expressed that group collaborative sessions provided time wherein teachers could challenge one another.

**Theme 5. Professional development sessions.** The primary teachers indicated professional development sessions helped them tremendously. They indicated that the sessions enabled team members to work together in planning lessons and understanding expectations. One teacher expressed that the professional development sessions helped

her to improve in instructional delivery as she used strategies learned and observed improved student performance.

Three themes emerged from the focus group session: (a) Peer culture, (b) teacher performance, and (c) instructional practice.  Instructional practice was the dominant theme.  (See Appendix, Table J7 for the list of themes and the associated quotes by the focus group participants).

**Theme 1.  Peer culture.**  The primary teachers alluded quite often to peer culture. They indicated that it was consistent and structured.  Noting that the peer culture was good, they expressed that it was conducive for learning and relaxation, except for a few interruptions that only required careful scheduling.

**Theme 2.  Teacher performance.**  The primary teachers voiced several beliefs regarding teacher performance.  Teacher preparedness was indicated as a determinant of effective teaching.  Student performance was another noted determinant.  Additionally, designated evaluators were noted as a determinant.

**Theme 3.  Instructional practices.**  The primary teachers expressed that they were implementing strategies learned in collaborative sessions and were slowly experiencing positive results in terms of student achievement.  They indicated that school leaders monitored instructional practices and that instructional decisions were data driven.  The belief among the teachers was that school leaders should provide consistency and clear expectations.  Another expectation was that school leaders listen to teachers and provide needed resources.

**Summary**

I presented findings that represented the feelings, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences of nine primary teachers regarding grade-level collaboration. In conducting the data analysis, using NVIVO software, I created themes from the survey, interview, and focus group data. Specifically, the themes that emerged were: (a) collaborative planning, (b) grade-level collaboration, (c) group collaborative sessions, (d) professional development sessions, (e) peer culture, (f) teacher performance, and (g) instructional practices. While student achievement is linked to professional growth and development, it did not emerge as a theme. One possibility may be because the participants' responses were more focused on the grade-level collaboration process, primarily on teaching strategies and lesson planning. They did, however, strongly express the belief that student achievement was a gradual process. Participant A stated, "Student growth is moving at a slow pace, but I feel wholeheartedly that teachers are implementing current strategies effectively" (Personal communication, February 25, 2020). Participant C stated, "Students are making gains at a slow rate, nevertheless, they are improving. This tells us that that teaching strategies are implemented correctly, with fidelity, and they are indeed impactful and support student achievement" (Personal communication, February 25, 2020).

The participating primary teachers unilaterally expressed that grade-level collaboration was mandated. The commonality among all groups (survey, interview, and focus) was that the participants felt that grade-level collaboration, which involved group collaborative sessions, was beneficial and needed. Another commonality among all groups was that the participants felt that grade-level collegiality was built by

collaborations. They agreed that the grade-level collaborative sessions helped them grow professionally and indicated that their experiences with grade-level collaboration were good. However, they expressed that they needed more uninterrupted time. The primary teachers specifically expressed that when they were called from grade-level collaborative sessions for unscheduled parent meetings, for example, it hampered the experience. They also indicated that they had experienced improvement in their teaching practices as well as in student performance while incorporating and implementing strategies learned in the collaborative sessions in their lesson plans. Thus, a comparison of the survey, interview, and focus group results indicated that all research questions were answered.

Presented in Chapter 5 is a discussion on the significance of the findings presented in this chapter. Conclusions and implications are also presented. Additionally, recommendations for further research are included.

**CHAPTER FIVE**

**DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In this chapter, I am presenting a detailed discussion on the significance of the results for the central research question and related questions. I am also presenting conclusions drawn from the results and implications for practice. Additionally, I am presenting recommendations for future research

The need for this phenomenological qualitative study was presented in Chapter One. Findings from existing literature were presented in Chapter 2. The methodology was presented in Chapter 3, and the results from survey, focus group, and interview data collected from nine primary school teachers, participants in grade-level collaboration, were presented in Chapter 4. Perception data were collected on: (a) the impact of collaboration on growth and development, (b the use of collaboration to build collegiality, (c) the benefits of grade level collaboration, and (d) drawbacks of grade level collaboration.

**Discussion**

Teacher collaboration was mandatory in the school district wherein this study was conducted. The collaborative sessions were scheduled, and teachers met with their peers to discuss pertinent items, to learn new strategies, and to plan lessons. I examined the thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and attitudes of primary school teachers who participated in grade-level collaboration regarding the impact of collaboration on growth and

development, the use of collaboration to build collegiality, the benefits of grade-level collaboration, and issues with grade-level collaboration.

**The Significance of the Results**

Using the data collected in this research study, I presented a clear understanding of the phenomenon from the lens of primary teachers who consistently participated in grade-level collaboration. The information the participants provided about their experiences was significant and comparatively common. In general, the participants viewed grade-level collaboration as significant and helpful for their professional growth and development. The primary teachers indicated that participating in grade-level collaboration was instrumental in planning lessons. They also indicated it was quite helpful in instructional delivery.

Through this study, I was successful in answering the central research question: What are the perceptions of primary teachers regarding key attributes of a grade-level collaborative session that fosters professional development? I also answered the four related questions: (a) What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the impact of collaboration on growth and development? (b) What perceptions are held by teachers on the use of collaboration to build collegiality? (c) What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the benefits of grade level collaboration? (d) What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the drawbacks of grade level collaboration?

**Growth and Development**

The focus of the first related question was on growth and development regarding professionalism in teaching. All participants in the three groups indicated that grade-level collaboration improved their professional growth and development. One interview

participant expressed that professional growth and development was experienced because professionals were learning with and from one another in collaboration. All participants in the survey group indicated that learning opportunities and resources were available to support teacher development and growth.

These findings were significant because when grade-level teachers planned together, engaged in relevant discussions, and resolved issues during collaboration, their level of confidence increased because they were better prepared. As a result, they became better at planning lessons and in the teaching process. The findings were also significant because the sessions helped teachers understand expectations. The major expectation for teachers engaged in grade-level collaboration was that of improved student academic achievement. Thus, an indication that grade-level collaboration influenced professional growth and development was when teachers linked student academic achievement to strategies they learned in grade-level collaboration and applied in the classroom. One teacher expressed that grade-level collaboration ensured that the students would receive "quality instruction."

**Collegiality**

The focus of the second related question was on perceptions of grade-level teachers regarding the use of collaboration to build collegiality. The participants in all groups indicated that they enjoyed the experience of working together with their fellow grade-level colleagues. The interview participants indicated that they had varied views but also shared common ground. They also indicated that grade-level collaboration provided opportunities to work as a team in planning lessons and developing strategies together. The interview participants further indicated that grade-level collaboration

helped teachers understand what was required and how to manage their workloads, which reduced stress associated with planning lessons. These results were significant because teachers shared strategies and discussed issues with their fellow colleagues who in turn incorporated them into their lessons to advance student learning.

**Benefits of Grade-Level Collaboration**

All participants in all groups expressed that grade-level collaboration was beneficial to them. All survey participants also concurred that the effectiveness of classroom practices was evaluated frequently by formative assessments. These findings were significant because of the impact instruction had on student performance.

Teachers participated in grade-level collaboration to acquire and apply skills in the classroom with the hope that students would perform well on formative assessments. One interview participant felt that because they "build off one another," they were stronger together. Two interview participants indicated that the degree of learning in grade-level collaboration was phenomenal. One participant noted she learned the value of individualized instruction in grade-level collaborative sessions. Another participant alluded to the intensive training she received in grade-level collaboration regarding a specific model, stating it was extremely beneficial as evidenced in her students' performance. These findings were significant because teachers needed to know how to individualize instruction to meet the diverse needs of students. Participating in grade-level collaboration fulfilled this need as the teachers learned various models that entailed various types of instruction, including individualized instruction, which helped them meet the various needs of the students.

**Drawbacks of Grade-Level Collaboration**

The survey group expressed no issues or drawbacks of grade level collaboration. The time element was an issue for the interview group. They noted that required teacher duties at the beginning of collaborative planning, i.e. escorting the students to their next class, take away a significant amount of time from the sessions. Another noted issue was teachers being called away from collaborative planning to attend unscheduled parent meetings. A similar issue noted by the interview group was school events scheduled during collaboration. One teacher noted assemblies and other programs can "sometimes pose a barrier." The focus group concurred with the interview group in indicating "a few" interruptions in collaborative planning sessions due to unscheduled meetings. These findings were significant because teachers needed every minute of the time allotted for grade-level collaboration with fellow colleagues to effectively strategize. Interruptions reduced the time allocated to collaboratively complete plans for the week and caused the teachers to complete their plans individually, which were not aligned with those of their fellow grade-level teachers.

The findings were pertinent to current research, which suggested that teacher collaboration was major in the teaching-learning process. The findings concurred with current research as the participants in all groups expressed that collaboration was a district requirement and teachers were expected to incorporate strategies learned in collaborative sessions within the classroom. Teachers were also expected to be able to link student performance with instructional strategies they learned in collaborative sessions. The findings supported prior knowledge which indicated the perception of teachers was that effective collaboration yields effective instruction, and effective

instruction yields improved student performance (Goddard & Kim, 2018).  Researchers concluded that the perception of teachers is that differentiated instruction reinforces instructional methods (Goddard and Kim, 2018).  The findings in this study supported this perception as two interview participants noted they experienced good results when they used the strategy of differentiation, which was learned in collaborative sessions, by specifically tailoring instruction to the individual needs of their students.

Johnston and Tsai (2018) found that barriers existed and obstructed support of teacher collaboration.  As noted by some participants in this study, some barriers existed which interrupted collaborative sessions.  Gabriel-Petit (2017) noted that school leaders must be knowledgeable of barriers to collaboration.  If school leaders are knowledgeable of the barriers, they can ensure that no interruptions occur during collaboration.; however, some interruptions simply cannot be avoided.

Much literature revealed findings on general collaboration, which involved individuals engaged in discussions, working together to complete a task and on teacher collaboration, which involved teachers engaging in discussions, working together in planning lessons and learning strategies.  However, a limited amount of literature was available on perceptions of primary grade-level teacher collaboration on professional development and growth and its effect on student achievement.  Thus, a gap exists on this topic.  The primary grade level is where a child receives his or her foundational education.  Therefore, it is critical that primary teachers participate in collaborative sessions to acquire much consistent training, engage in many grade-level discussions, work together on planning lessons, and learn strategies to prepare the children for the next level in the educational process.

## Conclusions

Through this phenomenological qualitative research study, I sought to answer the research question: "What are the perceptions of primary teachers regarding key attributes of a grade-level collaborative session that foster professional development?" To assist in answering the central research question, four related questions were posed: (a) What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the impact of collaboration on growth and development? (b) What perceptions are held by teachers on the use of collaboration to build collegiality? (c) What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the benefits of grade level collaboration? (d) What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the drawbacks of grade level collaboration? Data were collected from nine primary teachers. Three primary teachers completed a survey, three participated in the focus group, and three participated in a separate semi-structured interview. I used Power and Renner's (2003) outline for thematic analysis and NVIVO in analyzing the data, and a complete representation of primary teachers' perceptions regarding grade-level teacher collaboration emerged.

The participants in this study described their experiences, feelings, beliefs, and attitudes regarding grade-level collaboration. I outlined several conclusions from this study. I found nine key attributes of a grade-level collaborative session that foster professional development: (a) established norms, (b) shared input, (c) trusting relationships, (d) teaching and learning, (e) brainstorming, (f) intensive training, (g) strategies, (h) curriculum, and (i) instructional delivery. Another conclusion was that grade-level collaboration was beneficial in the teaching and learning process because it is inclusive and not only meets the individual needs of teachers, it also meets the academic

needs of students. Opportunities were provided for grade-level teachers to share and learn teaching strategies designed to improve their teaching and student achievement. A third benefit was that grade-level collaboration provided instruction in classroom management, general tips, and training on how to: (a) get parents involved, (b) communicate effectively, (c) resolve conflicts, and (d) exhibit professionalism. A fourth conclusion was that grade-level collaboration afforded teachers opportunities to be genuine with their thoughts and feelings and to provide or receive encouragement. A fifth conclusion was that in grade-level collaboration, teachers were viewed as equals, regardless of the number of years in the profession; beginning teachers were free to provide input. Every team member was respected. A sixth conclusion was that grade-level collaborations were not immune to interruptions.

Inconsistencies observed between the results of this study and those of prior research were in the number and types of barriers. Results of this study revealed only two barriers. I found one barrier to be a few interruptions during collaboration, with the interruptions being teachers called out of collaboration to attend unscheduled parent meetings or cancellation of collaboration because of a school event. The second barrier was a time element, as teachers were not afforded the entire time allotted for collaboration because they were required to escort their students to their assigned classes before going to collaboration.

Prior research revealed nine common barriers to collaboration in organizations: (a) a lack of respect and trust, (b) different mindsets, (c) poor listening skills, (d) Knowledge deficits, (e)a lack of alignment around goals, (f) internal competitiveness, (g) information hoarding, (h) organizational silos, (i) and physical separation (Gabriel-Petit,

2017). Johnston & Tsai (2018) concurred with Gabriel-Petit (2017), noting that more than a few barriers confront teachers during scheduled teacher collaboration sessions. However, in this study, I found none of the barriers listed by Gabriel-Petit.

Gabriel-Petit listed a lack of trust and having different mindsets as barriers. However, I found a great deal of trust, and the participants indicated they welcomed different mindsets as varied input, with the team members collectively making decisions. Contradictory to Gabriel-Petit's findings, the participants in this study demonstrated excellent listening skills. There were no knowledge deficits to the point of being a barrier. The participants understood that the collaboration was about teaching and learning and that no one would know it all, but hopefully everyone would learn something.

The results of this study revealed established goals and expectations communicated at each session. Thus, there was not a lack of alignment around goals. There was also no indication of internal competitiveness in the results of this study as all were grade-level teachers trying to learn all they could to move their students forward. The teachers welcomed mentors and mentored one another. The results in this study revealed teachers shared information and ideas. There was no indication of hoarding information as was found by Gabriel-Petit. No indications of organizational silos surfaced in this study. The results of this study revealed that some teams collaborated better than others, but it was specifically noted that ego issues were nonexistent because the team members were fully committed to the work and focused on how to help their students be successful. Lastly, there were no indications in the results of this study of

physical separation. Other than the few interruptions noted, all collaborative sessions were held on schedule.

Whether barriers exist may depend on school leadership. The school at the site of this study was known for strong and effective leadership with high expectations for teacher collaboration. Thus, it may be that the school administrator was not aware of the few interruptions the teachers were experiencing. Gabriel-Petit (2017) concluded that school leaders should be aware of the interruptions. If they are informed of the barriers, it is probable that the barriers would not only be reduced but possibly eliminated.

**Strengths of the Study**

A strength of this study was the phenomenology design because it provided a more expansive perspective as emphasis was placed on lived experiences. Another strength of this study was the use of three instruments which generated a variety of responses and an opportunity to compare responses among the triangulation.

**Weaknesses of the Study**

The scope of the study was a weakness because only nine individuals from the same school participated in the study. Including participants from other schools within the same school district or from other school districts would have provided a broader perspective. All participants were female, which provided only a female perspective. Another possible weakness of the study was that I included only primary teachers. If teachers from the fourth and fifth grade levels had been included, a broader perspective would have been provided.

**Implications for Practice**

The research findings of this study have major implications for grade-level collaboration. The data supported grade-level collaboration. I learned how primary teachers consistently participated in grade-level collaboration to improve their teaching strategies with the hope of helping to improve student performance. One implication was that when the primary teachers came together with the expressed purpose of planning lessons, learning new strategies, and applying them in the classroom, student achievement slowly improved. Another implication was that when primary teachers participated consistently in grade-level collaboration, classroom management became less burdensome for teachers struggling in this area because they received tips from teachers who had no classroom management issues. A third implication was that when primary teachers participated consistently in grade-level collaboration, they experienced growth and developed more professionally. They became more encouraged to persevere, and most importantly, they experienced positive results in the form of student achievement. I recommend that teachers who consistently participate in grade-level collaboration use acquired skills not only with students but with parents as well, by sharing some strategies that parents could use to help their children be successful.

For site-level school administrators, my recommendations are the same as those noted by the interview and focus group participants: (a) be consistent and provide well-defined expectations, (b) listen to teachers' appeals, and (c) ensure teachers are provided needed resources. Another recommendation is to ensure that provisions are made for uninterrupted time during grade-level collaborative sessions. Additionally, the

participants and I recommend that school administrators be supportive and have patience with grade-level teachers as it takes time to modify practices.

## Recommendations for Further Research

Several research studies have been conducted to examine teacher collaboration in general. However, gaps exist in the research on perceptions of primary teachers regarding the use of grade-level collaboration. Results of this study would expand knowledge on grade-level collaboration at the primary school level. However, further research is needed on examining perceptions of primary teachers and teachers of fourth and fifth grade students regarding grade-level collaboration on professional development and growth and its impact on student achievement. Additionally, research is needed on examining middle and high school teacher perceptions regarding grade-level collaboration on professional development and growth. These research studies should focus on the teachers working together in planning common lessons and strategizing to equip students with the tools they need for success. I recommend ongoing research that provides opportunities to examine perceptions of primary teachers and teachers of fourth and fifth grade students on how grade-level collaboration could improve student academic performance and professional development and growth. I also recommend ongoing research for middle and high school teachers on the topic.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent for Survey Group

**Teacher Group: Individual Participant**

My name is Tracey B. Muff, and I am a Doctoral Candidate at National Louis University. I am asking you to participate in this study, **"Examining Primary Teacher Perceptions of Collaboration on Professional Growth and Development",** occurring from **01-2020 to 01-2021**. The purpose of this study will be to examine teachers' attitudes, experiences and beliefs regarding the impact of primary grade level collaboration on professional development to strengthen instructional practice leading to higher student achievement.  The goal of this study is to understand primary grade-level collaboration and its influence on professional development. Emphasis will be placed on acquiring an understanding of the perceptions of teachers regarding their use of primary grade-level collaborative practices while observing traits that foster teacher development and growth. This form outlines the purpose of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

By signing below, you are providing consent to participate in a research project conducted by Tracey B. Muff, student, at National Louis University, Chicago. Please understand that the intent of this study is to acquire knowledge of teacher interactions during professional development. The study seeks to glean teacher perceptions and observe collaborative practices, thus, the qualitative research design was selected.  The goal will be to explore the process and impact of collaborative practices and *not* to evaluate collaborative sessions. Participation in this study will include:

➢ A 40-minute electronic survey will be completed by the selected participants. The survey will capture teachers' perceptions of collaborative protocols, practices, as well as individual views and thoughts surrounding grade level collaboration.

Your participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time without any negative consequences. The results of this study may be published or otherwise reported at conferences, and employed to inform teacher collaboration practices, but participants' identities will in no way be revealed. Data will be reported anonymously and bear no identifiers that could connect data to individual participants. To ensure confidentiality the researcher will secure recordings, transcripts, and field notes in a locked cabinet in her home office. Only the researcher will have access to data. There are no anticipated risks or benefits, no greater than that encountered in daily life. Further, the information gained from this study could be useful to the teaching profession at large and could be used to enhance professional learning communities through fostering quality collaborative sessions. Upon request you may receive summary results from this study and copies of any publications that may occur. Please email the researcher at tmuff@my.nl.edu to request results from this study. In the event that you have questions or require additional information, please contact the researcher, Tracey Muff, tmuff@my.nl.edu; 478-335-1740.

 If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Dawn Coffin, at dcoffin1@d2l.nl.edu; or the co-chairs of NLU's Institutional Research Board: Dr. Shaunti Knauth; email: Shaunti.Knauth@nl.edu; phone: (312) 261-3526; or Dr. Kathleen Cornett; email:

kcornett@nl.edu; phone: (844) 380-5001. Co-chairs are located at National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

Thank you for your consideration.

*Consent*:
I understand that by checking "Yes" below, I am agreeing to participate in the study **"Examining Primary Teacher Perceptions of Collaboration on Professional Growth and Development".** My participation will consist of the activities below during January – February 2020 time period.

- Completion of an online survey will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below. You may print a copy of this consent below. You may print a copy of this consent form for your records. Clicking on the "Agree" button indicates that:

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are 18 years of age or older

☐ Agree
☐ Disagree


_____     _____
Participant's Signature                                      Date


_____     _____
Researcher's Signature                                      Date

Revised

July 2019

Appendix B

Informed Consent Observation Interview

**Teacher Group: Individual Participant**

My name is Tracey B. Muff, and I am a Doctoral Candidate at National Louis University. I am asking you to participate in this study, **"Examining Primary Teacher Perceptions of Collaboration on Professional Growth and Development",** occurring from **01-2020 to 01-2021**. The purpose of this study will be to examine teachers' attitudes, experiences and beliefs regarding the impact of primary grade level collaboration on professional development to strengthen instructional practice leading to higher student achievement.  The goal of this study is to understand primary grade-level collaboration and its influence on professional development. Emphasis will be placed on acquiring an understanding of the perceptions of teachers regarding their use of primary grade-level collaborative practices while observing traits that foster teacher development and growth. This form outlines the purpose of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

By signing below, you are providing consent to participate in a research project conducted by Tracey B. Muff, student, at National Louis University. Please understand that the intent of this study is to acquire knowledge of teacher interactions during professional development. The study seeks to glean teacher perceptions and observe collaborative practices, thus, the qualitative research design was selected.  The goal will be to explore the process and impact of collaborative practices and *not* to evaluate collaborative sessions. Participation in this study will include:

> ➢ 1 interview scheduled at your convenience in the winter during the 2019-20 academic year. Each interview will last up to 45 min. and include approximately 10 questions to understand teacher perceptions regarding collaboration and professional growth as well as its impact on student achievement. Interviews will be recorded and participants may view and have final approval on the content of interview transcripts.

Your participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time without any negative consequences. The results of this study may be published or otherwise reported at conferences, and employed to inform teacher collaboration practices, but participants' identities will in no way be revealed. Data will be reported anonymously and bear no identifiers that could connect data to individual participants. To ensure confidentiality the researcher will secure recordings, transcripts, and field notes in a locked cabinet in her home office. Only the researcher will have access to data. There are no anticipated risks or benefits, no greater than that encountered in daily life. Further, the information gained from this study could be useful to the teaching profession at large and could be used to enhance professional learning communities through fostering quality collaborative sessions. Upon request you may receive summary results from this study and copies of any publications that may occur. Please email the researcher at tmuff@my.nl.edu to request results from this study. In the event that you have questions or require additional information, please contact the researcher, Tracey Muff, tmuff@my.nl.edu;  478-335-1740.

 If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Dawn Coffin, at dcoffin1@d2l.nl.edu; or the co-chairs of NLU's Institutional Research Board: Dr. Shaunti Knauth; email: Shaunti.Knauth@nl.edu; phone: ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓; or Dr. Kathleen Cornett; email:

kcornett@nl.edu; phone: ███████████. Co-chairs are located at National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

Thank you for your consideration.

*Consent*:
I understand that by signing below, I am agreeing to participate in the study "Examining Primary Teacher Perceptions of Collaboration on Professional Growth and Development". My participation will consist of the activities below during January-February 2020.

> ➢ 1 Interview lasting approximately 45 minutes

_____ _____
Participant's Signature                                      Date

_____ _____
Researcher's Signature                                       Date

Appendix C

Informed Consent for Observatory Focus Group

**Teacher Group: Individual Participant**

My name is Tracey B. Muff, and I am a Doctoral Candidate at National Louis University. I am asking you to participate in this study, **"Examining Primary Teacher Perceptions of Collaboration on Professional Growth and Development",** occurring from **01-2020 to 01-2021**. The purpose of this study will be to examine teachers' attitudes, experiences and beliefs regarding the impact of primary grade level collaboration on professional development to strengthen instructional practice leading to higher student achievement.  The goal of this study is to understand primary grade-level collaboration and its influence on professional development. Emphasis will be placed on acquiring an understanding of the perceptions of teachers regarding their use of primary grade-level collaborative practices while observing traits that foster teacher development and growth. This form outlines the purpose of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

By signing below, you are providing consent to participate in a research project conducted by Tracey B. Muff, student, at National Louis University. Please understand that the intent of this study is to acquire knowledge of teacher interactions during professional development. The study seeks to glean teacher perceptions and observe collaborative practices, thus, the qualitative research design was selected.  The goal will be to explore the process and impact of collaborative practices and *not* to evaluate collaborative sessions. Participation in this study will include:

- ➢ A 90-minute total observation (two 45-minute observations) to gain contextual understanding and observe teachers' collaborative protocol, interactions, conversations, and participation. The researcher will take field notes during observations and to capture the ways teachers interact with one another. Participants may view field notes and have final approval on the content of the field notes gathered during observations.

- ➢ A 40-minute focus group session (e.g. asking reflective questions, discussing successes and struggles, discussing effective teaching strategies, etc.). Participants may view responses and have final approval on the content of responses gathered during the focus group session.

Your participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time without any negative consequences. The results of this study may be published or otherwise reported at conferences, and employed to inform teacher collaboration practices, but participants' identities will in no way be revealed. Data will be reported anonymously and bear no identifiers that could connect data to individual participants. To ensure confidentiality the researcher will secure recordings, transcripts, and field notes in a locked cabinet in her home office. Only the researcher will have access to data. There are no anticipated risks or benefits, no greater than that encountered in daily life. Further, the information gained from this study could be useful to the teaching profession at large and could be used to enhance professional learning communities through fostering quality collaborative sessions. Upon request you may receive summary results from this study and copies

of any publications that may occur. Please email the researcher at tmuff@my.nl.edu to request results from this study. In the event that you have questions or require additional information, please contact the researcher, Tracey Muff, tmuff@my.nl.edu; 478-335-1740.

 If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Dawn Coffin, at dcoffin1@d2l.nl.edu; or the co-chairs of NLU's Institutional Research Board: Dr. Shaunti Knauth; email: Shaunti.Knauth@nl.edu; phone: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮; or Dr. Kathleen Cornett; email: kcornett@nl.edu; phone: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. Co-chairs are located at National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

Thank you for your consideration.

*Consent*:
I understand that by signing below, I am agreeing to participate in the study "Examining Primary Teacher Perceptions of Collaboration on Professional Growth and Development". My participation will consist of the activities below during *January-February 2020.*

> ➢ 2 Observations lasting approximately 45 minutes each

> ➢ 1 Focus Group session lasting approximately 40 minutes


_____          _____
Participant's Signature                                              Date


_____          _____
Researcher's Signature                                             Date

Appendix D

Observation Protocol

| Teacher Traits Observed | Observer Comments |
|---|---|
| | |
| a. How teachers interact with one another | The teachers appear to be very cordial to one another; they work together seamlessly to get the task of grade level lesson planning and student data disaggregation completed |
| b. The types of conversations teachers are having with one another | Teachers are processing information, seeking best teaching practices, discussing what has worked with students, what hasn't worked, and how all can improve their teaching efforts and student learning practices |
| c. The kinds of activities/discussions team members are engaging in | Teachers are discussing high leverage/priority standards. These priority standards focus on skills that are imperative for student success in each grade level. These standards are prerequisite standards for grade level mastery and advancing to the next grade level |
| d. The grade level planning protocol used | Yes. |
| e. Things that seemed to make the meeting successful | Teachers followed their collaborative planning protocol, a timekeeper/recorder was identified (monitors time for each section of the protocol and take notes), a facilitator was identified (guides the meeting), and a moderator (keeps the meeting on task). All members were committed to stay on task and use the time wisely. The goal was to come away with solutions and positive take-a-ways to enhance teacher performance and student learning |
| f. Teacher participation in the grade level discussion | Teachers were very participative, no reservations in discussing concerns, misunderstandings, short comings, and successes! |
| g. Grade level meeting norms | |

Appendix E

Observer Checklist

- Did every member join in on the team's discussion?  Yes ___ No ___
- Did each member listen attentively as others spoke? Yes ___ No ___
- Did one or two members dominate the discussion? Yes ___ No ___
- Did all members arrive on time and stay for the meeting? Yes ___ No ___
- Were all members prepared for the meeting when they arrived? Yes__ No ___
- Were all members "totally present" during the meeting? Yes ___ No ___

Appendix F

Survey for Survey Group

**On a scale of 1-4, with 1 being strongly disagree and 4 being strongly agree, please provide feedback regarding how you feel about the grade-level collaborative planning approach.**

**Shared Beliefs, Values, and Vision**

1. After the teacher collaboration program began at my school, I felt that my role had a different image in the school.

2. As a grade level, we have a set of short-term measurable goals.

3. Our school-wide goals and objectives for student learning are related to our school vision.

4. There is a teacher-leadership team that assists the school in creating and sharing common beliefs and values.

5. Our grade level developed a set of values that we share.

6. Our school's vision describes a future in which students achieve at high levels, and there is a measurable goal.

**Collective Learning**

7. As a grade level, we frequently innovate classroom practice and then measure its effectiveness with formative assessments.

8. During our department team meetings, common assessments are made to assess student achievement and learning

9. As a department team, we frequently engage in professional dialogue.

10. Team dialoguing is valued among the department team because we find that we come to common understandings when we voice our points of view.

11. The grade level team is comfortable with discussing data.

12. Student data is frequently collected and discussed at grade level meetings.

13. My grade level's planning leads to improved student learning.

**Supportive Conditions**

14. The school was given professional development in collaboration.

15. My view of collaboration is that it is strategic, based on data, and uses action research.

16. My colleagues and I mentor and coach each other and are allocated the resources to do so.

17. There are a set of group norms developed by our department team that are strictly adhered to.

18. There is time allotted for teacher collaboration.

19. Professional learning opportunities and resources are available for teachers to support development and growth.

Appendix G

Interview Protocol

**Impact of Collaboration on Professional Development**

1. Do you believe participating in the collaborative sessions help you to develop more in your professional endeavors?  If so, please explain.  If not, please explain your response.

**Use of Collaboration to Build Collegiality**

2. How would you define collegiality?

3. What has been your experiences working collaboratively with your colleagues?

4. What is the most common issue or challenge you have experienced with grade-level collaboration?

5. What do you like the most about working collaboratively with your colleagues?

6. What do you dislike the most about working collaboratively with your colleagues?

**Benefits of Grade-Level Collaboration**

7. Do you feel participating in the collaborative sessions improves your instruction?

8. Have your students experienced any gains as a result of your incorporating strategies you learned from the collaborative sessions? If so, please provide examples of some strategies you have used?

**Overview**

9. Do you have any specific stories about how the use of grade-level collaboration can impact professional development?

10. Is there anything we have not covered that you feel is important to add?

Appendix H

Focus Group Protocol

**Peer Culture**
**Section Focus**: The time I spend with my colleagues is productive.

1. What opportunities do you have to collaborate with colleagues?

2. What procedures are in place that either facilitate or detract from productive

   collaboration?

3. Are there some teams that collaborate better than others? What makes those

   groups successful?

**Teacher Performance**
**Section Focus:** The expectations for effective teaching are clearly defined at my school.

4. Do school leaders have expectations for what effective teaching looks like?

5. Who is involved in determining what effective teaching is?

6. How are these expectations for effective teaching presented to teachers?

7. If a teacher has a question about these expectations, who can this teacher turn to

   for support?

8. Are school leaders properly evaluating effective teaching based on these

   expectations?

**Instructional Practices**
**Section Focus:** My school is committed to improving instructional practice.

9. What do school leaders currently do in order to improve instructional practice?

10. Are current strategies being implemented effectively?

11. What do teachers need from leaders in order to improve their instructional

    practice?

Appendix I

Table I8

Themes Extracted from Interview Sessions: Primary Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Grade-Level Collaboration

| Theme | Quote |
|---|---|
| Collaborative Planning | • "I consider it a plus to be on a team. I have not disliked any aspect of collaborative planning."<br><br>• "The collaborative planning protocol from the district lays out the detailed expectations of teachers:  What we are to teach, how to break it down for the students, how to assess students' understanding, and how to reteach if needed."<br><br>• "We have conferences throughout the year that allow for detailed conversation to occur based on what the teaching expectations will be, what professional development will occur, what amount of growth is expected for students, how to exude professionalism, and that collaborative planning with grade levels both horizontally and vertically is the expectation." |
| Collaborative Sessions | • "Yes. Collaborative sessions do help. It definitely makes our workload more manageable.  It also minimizes our stress levels by having someone to lean on for support in addition to the academic coach." |

| Grade-Level Collaboration | • "Yes, they do. These sessions help all us to plan instructional lessons together, share ideas, brainstorm resources, and discover new things."<br><br>• "Yes, this is when it's really important to build off of one another, throw ideas out and weed through them to determine the best approach or combination of approaches to best meet the needs of our students." |
| --- | --- |
| Group Collaborative Sessions | • "Yes. These group collaborative sessions are helpful. It helps to ensure that we are teaching our students quality instruction. We balance one another out, and also challenge one another's thoughts."<br>• "Yes. These group collaborative sessions are helpful. It helps to ensure that we are teaching our students quality instruction. We balance one another out, and also challenge one another's thoughts." |
| Professional Development Sessions | • Yes. I left a K-2 Phonics professional development session completely clueless about the content of the session or how I would redeliver these expectations to my students. We broke it down step-by-step during grade level collaboration, and my team members helped me to map out a plan and understand the expectations completely." |

Appendix J

Table J7

Themes Extracted from Focus Group Session: Primary Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Grade-Level Collaboration

| Theme | Quote |
|-------|-------|
| Peer Culture | <ul><li>"We collaborate daily at a designated time. Our students are attending extra-curricular classes for 50 minutes each day and we plan during that time."</li><li>"To facilitate teacher efforts, we have a daily schedule that provides consistency and direction for the teachers. The only detraction I've experienced is unannounced visitors coming to present to the teachers when we've prepared to collaborate amongst one another."</li><li>"Yes. They come to school with the sole purpose of increasing student achievement on their minds. They</li><li>commit themselves to the work and refuse to allow egos or distractions alter the meeting."</li></ul> |
| Teacher Performance | <ul><li>"Yes. Although there are many different ways to teach effectively, good instructors have several qualities in common. They are prepared, set clear and fair expectations, have a positive attitude, are patient with students, and assess their teaching on a regular basis."</li><li>"I think the students are the major determiners of what effective teaching is. Their mastery or lack of suggests whether or not effective teaching has occurred. Effective teaching is the ability to improve student achievement as shown by research."</li><li>"Teachers engage in a pre-conference, mid-year conference as well as an end</li></ul> |

of the year conference. It's during these times that school leaders share the evaluation instrument that will be used to evaluate teachers. performance throughout the year. They explain that this process is cumulative and not a one-time evaluation. There are opportunities to improve upon teacher ratings throughout the year."

- "Principal, Assistant Principal, Academic Coach, Mentor Teachers, Teachers on their team with experience."
- "Yes, and with fairness and consistency."

Instructional Practices

- "We have frequent professional learning sessions, daily support from our academic coach. They are committed to: Building and sustaining a school vision, sharing leadership leading a learning community, using data to make instructional decisions, monitoring curriculum and instruction, sharing leadership, leading a learning community, using data to make instructional decisions, and monitoring curriculum and instruction.
- Well student growth is moving at a slow pace, but I feel wholeheartedly that teachers are implementing current strategies effectively
- Consistency, clear expectations, listen to the requests of the teachers, provide a wealth of resources and on-going professional development based on the school's specific needs and the students we serve, not a cookie cutter approach that has worked for others. Tailor our efforts specifically to the needs of our population. Take small steps: Also, realize that learning is incremental, and it takes time to change practice. To make lasting change, support teachers with the time, resources, and coaching they need as they transfer new learning into their

daily routines. Supportive answerability:  Teachers, like any professionals, need to be held responsible for results AND they must be provided with the time and resources to accomplish meaningful change."