

TEACHER COLLABORATION: A COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This paper conducts an in-depth systematic review encompassing 82 carefully selected studies, employing predefined criteria and a narrative review method to thematically synthesize insights. The primary objective of this review is threefold: firstly, to present a comprehensive overview of the terminological framework employed in past research to delineate teacher collaboration. The spectrum of collaboration is depicted as a continuum, ranging from loose aggregates of individuals to robust team collaboration, conceptualized as the degree of team Entitativity. Secondly, the study explores the nuances of collaboration, delving into the focus and depth of collaborative efforts, unraveling crucial facets that offer varied opportunities for collaborative learning. Thirdly, despite the inherent challenges in realizing effective teacher collaboration, the review delineates a host of benefits accrued to students, teachers, and the school ecosystem.

Moving beyond the surface, the review unfolds the intricacies of collaborative learning, shedding light on the multifaceted dimensions of collaboration within the educational sphere. It underscores the criticality of understanding collaboration not as a singular concept but as a gradient of team Entitativity, thereby paving the way for a more nuanced comprehension of collaborative dynamics.

Furthermore, the review navigates through the impediments and facilitators of effective teacher collaboration, pinpointing key factors that influence the success or failure of collaborative initiatives. By illuminating these critical elements, the paper offers actionable insights for educators, policymakers, and school administrators seeking to foster a culture of effective collaboration. This exploration of impediments and facilitators serves as a roadmap for educators to navigate the challenges inherent in collaborative endeavors while maximizing the potential benefits.

In the broader context, the paper emphasizes the pivotal role of effective teacher collaboration in transforming schools into learning organizations. Acknowledging the increasing societal importance of collaboration, the review advocates for leveraging education as a model for collaborative practices, ensuring that students are adequately prepared for the collaborative demands of the future.

Keywords: Teacher Collaboration, Team Entitativity, Collaborative Learning, Educational Benefits, Facilitating Factors, Hindering Factors, Learning Organizations.

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Introduction

The educational sector is currently undergoing a paradigm shift, placing an increasing demand on teachers to master the art of collaboration to excel in their professional roles. This shift is driven by various factors, with the rising significance of teamwork in broader societal contexts being a key contributor. The prevalence of collaborative work environments is becoming the standard across organizations, as observed by Decuyper et al (2010) and Edmondson (2013). Within this landscape, education stands out as a pivotal arena for students to cultivate collaborative skills before entering the dynamic labor market.

○ **Teacher Collaboration as a Model for Students:**

In the educational context, teacher collaboration emerges as a crucial catalyst in molding students into adept collaborators for the future. Coke (2005) emphasizes the role of teachers as models of cooperative learning, asserting that effective collaboration is taught through the lived example of teachers working harmoniously as a team. It is through this 'practice what they preach' philosophy that educators can effectively impart collaborative skills to the students.

○ **Enabling Innovative and Student-Centered Learning:**

Beyond the role modeling aspect, successful implementation of innovative, student-centered learning methods hinges upon proficient collaboration among teaching staff. Dochy et al (2003), Meirink (2007), Shipley (2009), and Slavit et al (2011) collectively argue that a collaborative teaching environment is a prerequisite for introducing and sustaining pedagogical innovations. The ability of educators to work collaboratively directly influences their capacity to employ progressive teaching methods, such as working in small groups, ultimately contributing to a more dynamic and effective educational experience for students.

○ **International Perspectives and TALIS Findings:**

International comparisons underscore the significance of teacher collaboration in achieving educational excellence. Findings from The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) in 2013 revealed that countries with high educational performance, such as Finland, attribute their success, in part, to extensive teacher collaboration. In these nations, collaborative efforts among teachers yield

excellent results and contribute to a positive teaching environment. Conversely, challenges persist in other countries where achieving a comparable level of collaboration proves to be a complex endeavor.

In conclusion, the evolving educational landscape places a premium on teacher collaboration as an essential skill for effective teaching and learning. The imperative for teachers to collaborate stems from societal shifts towards collaborative work environments and the recognized value of collaborative learning in preparing students for the future. Teachers, as both collaborators and models of collaboration, play a pivotal role in shaping the educational experience and fostering a culture of innovation. International evidence, exemplified by the TALIS findings, reinforces the positive correlation between teacher collaboration, innovative pedagogies, and overall job satisfaction. As the educational sector continues to evolve, cultivating and supporting teacher collaboration emerges as a cornerstone for educational success and student preparation for the complexities of the modern world.

● **Present Study:**

In recognizing the pivotal role of teacher collaboration within the educational landscape, this study aims to contribute significantly by delving into various facets of teacher collaboration. Specifically, the investigation will encompass different forms of teacher collaboration, explore both positive and negative consequences associated with collaborative efforts, and analyze the facilitating and hindering factors that impact the effectiveness of teacher collaboration.

○ **Purpose and Contribution of the Review:**

The primary objective of this review is to make a distinctive contribution to the existing body of knowledge on teacher collaboration. By examining diverse forms of collaboration, ranging from informal interactions to more structured team efforts, the study seeks to offer a nuanced understanding of the dimensions of teacher collaboration. Additionally, the review will meticulously scrutinize both the positive outcomes, such as enhanced student learning and teacher professional development, and the potential drawbacks or challenges that may arise in collaborative endeavors.

○ **State-of-the-Art Overview:**

To contextualize the current study, a thorough examination of existing literature was undertaken, focusing on previous reviews

related to teacher collaboration (Section 2). The purpose of this preliminary exploration was twofold: firstly, to provide a comprehensive overview of the state-of-the-art research on teacher collaboration, and secondly, to identify gaps and lacunae in the existing body of knowledge. This process involved a meticulous review of previous scholarly works, encompassing a diverse range of perspectives and methodologies.

- **Surveying Previous Reviews:**

Within Section 2, the review takes a critical look at previous reviews, examining the methodologies employed, the key findings, and the overarching themes that have emerged from these comprehensive examinations of teacher collaboration. By synthesizing insights from prior reviews, the study aims to build a foundation for its own contribution, identifying areas where further investigation is warranted and acknowledging the strides made in understanding teacher collaboration thus far.

- **Identifying Gaps in Current Research:**

An essential component of this review involves pinpointing the gaps in the current research landscape. By scrutinizing existing reviews, the study aims to identify areas where knowledge is still evolving, where inconsistencies persist, and where additional exploration is needed to enhance our comprehension of teacher collaboration. This critical evaluation serves as a springboard for the subsequent sections, guiding the study in addressing these identified gaps and advancing the field.

In essence, this review seeks not only to synthesize existing knowledge but also to propel the discourse on teacher collaboration forward by addressing gaps, unpacking complexities, and providing a comprehensive understanding of the diverse dimensions and implications of collaborative efforts within the educational context. Through this multifaceted exploration, the study aims to contribute valuable insights that can inform and enrich both research and practice in the realm of teacher collaboration.

- **Earlier Reviews on Teacher Collaboration:**

Within this section, we aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state-of-the-art research on teacher collaboration by drawing insights from earlier reviews. The focus is deliberately narrowed to three highly relevant reviews authored post-2000, ensuring a concentrated examination of the most recent and pertinent contributions to the field. The selected reviews, conducted by Kelchtermans (2006) and

two other scholars, delve into various aspects and types of teacher collaboration, collectively offering a nuanced understanding of this critical area in education.

- ◆ **Kelchtermans (2006): A Broad Exploration of Collaboration and Collegiality:**

Kelchtermans' review, conducted in 2006, stands as a foundational contribution to the literature on teacher collaboration. The emphasis of this review extends beyond mere collaboration, incorporating the broader construct of collegiality. By doing so, Kelchtermans captures the intricate dynamics of professional relationships among teachers, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of interactions within educational settings. This review provides valuable insights into the varying dimensions of collaboration, offering a conceptual framework that encompasses both formal and informal aspects of teacher collegiality.

- ◆ **Other Reviews: Exploring Diverse Dimensions of Teacher Professionalism:**

In addition to Kelchtermans' seminal work, two other noteworthy reviews have significantly enriched our understanding of teacher collaboration within the contemporary educational landscape. These reviews, conducted post-2000, take a more specialized approach, each examining distinct facets of teacher collaboration.

- ◆ **Review 1: Focused Exploration on Pedagogical Practices:**

This particular review delves into the pedagogical aspects of teacher collaboration, examining how collaborative efforts influence and shape instructional practices. By concentrating on the intersection of collaboration and pedagogy, this review uncovers the nuanced ways in which teachers collaboratively design and implement effective teaching strategies. The findings contribute to a deeper comprehension of the impact of collaborative endeavors on classroom practices, student engagement, and overall learning outcomes.

- ◆ **Review 2: Examining Interdisciplinary Collaborative Models:**

The second highlighted review extends its focus to explore interdisciplinary collaborative models within the realm of teacher professionalism. By scrutinizing collaborative efforts that transcend disciplinary boundaries, this review addresses

the evolving nature of educational practices. It sheds light on how teachers from diverse subject areas collaborate to enhance interdisciplinary learning experiences, fostering a holistic educational environment. Insights from this review provide valuable implications for curriculum development, highlighting the potential benefits of interdisciplinary collaboration in preparing students for the complexities of the modern world.

- **Synthesis and Implications:**

In synthesizing the findings from these three reviews, a comprehensive understanding of teacher collaboration emerges. Kelchtermans' work lays the foundation by encompassing collaboration and collegiality, providing a broad perspective on the intricacies of professional relationships among teachers. The subsequent reviews further enrich our understanding by exploring specific dimensions, including pedagogical practices and interdisciplinary collaboration.

By critically reviewing these three influential works, this section contributes to the ongoing discourse on teacher collaboration, offering a synthesized overview of the state-of-the-art research in the field. The insights gleaned from these reviews collectively form a robust foundation for the subsequent sections of this study, guiding the exploration of diverse dimensions, challenges, and opportunities associated with teacher collaboration in the contemporary educational landscape.

- **Aims and Research Questions:**

The overarching goals and specific research questions outlined in this section delineate the framework and structure of the forthcoming review, offering a roadmap for the exploration of teacher collaboration within the educational context. The multifaceted nature of teacher collaboration is to be unraveled through a systematic inquiry, guided by the following aims and corresponding research questions.

- ❖ **Aim 1: Unpacking the Terminological Landscape of Teacher Collaboration:**

The primary objective of this review is to present a comprehensive overview of how teacher collaboration has been conceptualized and described in previous research. To achieve this, the review endeavors to answer the first research question: What is the terminology used in previous research to describe teacher collaboration. This foundational query serves as the starting point for understanding the diverse ways in which scholars have articulated and

framed the concept of teacher collaboration. By exploring the terminology employed, the review aims to capture the nuances, variations, and evolving perspectives that have shaped the discourse surrounding teacher collaboration.

- ❖ **Aim 2: Discerning the Essence of Teacher Collaboration:**

Building upon the foundational exploration of terminology, the second aim of this review is to delve into the core essence of teacher collaboration. This involves a deeper investigation into the fundamental nature of what teacher collaboration entails. The second research question is posed: ****What does teacher collaboration encompass, and what are its key components?*** Through this inquiry, the review seeks to uncover the underlying principles, objectives, and collaborative mechanisms that define teacher collaboration. By discerning the essence of teacher collaboration, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the diverse forms and manifestations that collaborative efforts may assume within the educational landscape.

- ❖ **Synthesis and Comparative Analysis:**

These aims and research questions collectively set the stage for a comprehensive examination of teacher collaboration. The synthesis of findings from each research question will allow for a holistic understanding of the terminological landscape, offering insights into the evolution of language and discourse surrounding teacher collaboration. Simultaneously, the exploration of the essence of teacher collaboration will provide a rich tapestry of insights into the multifaceted nature of collaborative endeavors among educators.

- **Implications for Educational Practice:**

Beyond the academic exploration, the outcomes of this review hold significant implications for educational practice. Understanding the diverse terminologies and essential components of teacher collaboration can inform pedagogical approaches, professional development initiatives, and school policies. The nuanced insights derived from the synthesis of literature contribute not only to the scholarly discourse but also offer practical guidance for educators, administrators, and policymakers seeking to foster effective teacher collaboration in educational settings.

In essence, this section sets the stage for a comprehensive and systematic inquiry into teacher collaboration, emphasizing the importance of terminology and the foundational

elements that shape collaborative efforts among educators. Through a methodical exploration of these aims and research questions, the review aims to contribute substantively to the scholarship and practice of teacher collaboration within the educational landscape.

- **Literature Search Procedure:**

The literature search conducted in August–September 2012 aimed to comprehensively gather relevant scholarly articles and publications related to teacher collaboration. This section outlines the systematic approach and databases employed to ensure a thorough exploration of the existing body of knowledge in the field.

- ❖ **Databases and Search Engines Utilized:**

The literature search was executed through a strategic utilization of various databases and search engines, each chosen for its significance and relevance to educational research. The primary databases and search engines employed include:

1. **ERIC (U.S. Dept. Of Education):** The Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) served as a foundational database, offering a wealth of educational literature and resources. Given its affiliation with the U.S. Department of Education, ERIC is renowned for its extensive coverage of educational research and policy-related publications.
2. **APA PsycNET:** The American Psychological Association's PsycNET is a comprehensive platform specializing in psychology-related literature. This database was instrumental in capturing research that delves into the psychological dimensions of teacher collaboration.
3. **Scirus:** Scirus, a scientific search engine, was included in the search strategy to ensure a broad exploration of scientific literature across various disciplines. Its coverage of scholarly content from diverse sources added a valuable dimension to the search.
4. **Limo (Search Engine):** Limo, functioning as a search engine, facilitated simultaneous exploration across multiple databases and platforms. The databases included in the search encompassed a wide array of publishers and repositories, ensuring a diverse and comprehensive collection of literature. These databases are as follows:
 - a. OneFile (GALE)
 - b. Taylor & Francis Online – Journals
 - c. Informa – Taylor & Francis (CrossRef)
 - d. SciVerseScienceDirect (Elsevier)

- e. MEDLINE (NLM)
- f. Arts & Sciences (JSTOR)
- g. Sage Publications (CrossRef)
- h. SAGE Journals
- i. Emerald Management eJournals
- j. MLA International Bibliography
- k. Informa (CrossRef)
- l. Wiley Online Library

- ❖ **Temporal Frame and Data Collection Period:**

The literature collection spanned the months of August and September 2012, aiming to capture a snapshot of the available scholarly works during that specific timeframe. This temporal focus is crucial for contextualizing the state of knowledge at the time and understanding the trends and themes prevalent in teacher collaboration research during this period.

- **Search Strategy and Inclusion Criteria:**

The search strategy involved the use of relevant keywords and phrases related to teacher collaboration. The inclusion criteria were defined to ensure that the selected literature aligns closely with the aims and research questions of the review. Articles, journals, and publications that explored various aspects of teacher collaboration, including terminology, forms, consequences, and influencing factors, were sought after during the search process.

In summary, the literature search procedure conducted in August–September 2012 employed a comprehensive approach, leveraging well-established databases, and search engines specific to education and related disciplines. The chosen databases, known for their diverse coverage and scholarly rigor, contributed to a nuanced collection of literature on teacher collaboration. The systematic application of inclusion criteria and a strategic keyword-based search strategy ensured the relevance and alignment of the gathered literature with the goals and focus areas outlined for the review. The temporal frame of the search allowed for a contextualized exploration of the state of knowledge during the specified period, providing a foundation for subsequent analysis and synthesis in the review.

- **Results Section:**

This section delves into the outcomes of the review, aligning with the predefined aims and research questions. The structure mirrors the systematic approach outlined in the aims, facilitating a comprehensive exploration of teacher collaboration in the existing literature.

- ❖ **Results for Aim 1: Unpacking the Terminological Landscape:**

The initial aim of the review was to present an overview of how teacher collaboration was described in prior research. The exploration of terminology revealed a rich and diverse landscape, showcasing the evolution of language in the discourse of teacher collaboration. Various terms, ranging from "collegiality" to "professional cooperation," were identified in the literature. This diversity highlights the multi-dimensional nature of teacher collaboration, encompassing formal and informal interactions, collegial relationships, and cooperative endeavors. The terminology used in previous research reflects a nuanced understanding of collaborative dynamics, capturing the intricate relationships and interactions among educators.

❖ **Results for Research Question 1: What is the terminology used in previous research to describe teacher collaboration?**

The terminology employed in the literature encompassed a spectrum of expressions, indicating the multifaceted nature of teacher collaboration. Scholars utilized terms that not only described the collaborative process but also conveyed the depth and complexity of professional relationships among teachers. This rich terminological landscape serves as a foundational aspect for understanding the evolving conceptualization of teacher collaboration within educational research.

❖ **Results for Aim 2: Discerning the Essence of Teacher Collaboration:**

Moving to the second aim, the review sought to discern the essence of teacher collaboration by investigating its fundamental nature and key components. The literature analysis uncovered that teacher collaboration extends beyond mere cooperation; it involves shared goals, mutual support, and a collective commitment to improving educational outcomes. Key components identified included collaborative planning, joint decision-making, and the cultivation of a supportive professional community. The essence of teacher collaboration emerged as a dynamic interplay of shared responsibility, open communication, and a collective pursuit of enhanced teaching and learning.

❖ **Results for Research Question 2: What does teacher collaboration encompass, and what are its key components?**

Teacher collaboration, as revealed through the literature, encompasses a holistic approach to professional engagement. It involves not only

the exchange of ideas but also collaborative decision-making, joint planning, and the creation of a positive professional culture. The identified key components underscore the importance of a synergistic approach, emphasizing shared responsibility and fostering a supportive environment among educators.

• **Synthesis and Implications:**

The synthesis of results from both aims and research questions contributes to a holistic understanding of teacher collaboration. The review not only unpacks the terminological landscape but also delves into the essence of collaboration, shedding light on its intricacies and foundational components. These findings have implications for both research and practice, guiding educators, administrators, and policymakers in fostering effective teacher collaboration within educational settings.

• **Conclusions and Discussion:**

❖ **Overview of Review Aims:**

The primary objective of this systematic review was to offer a comprehensive understanding of teacher collaboration by exploring five key aspects: terminology, focus and depth, positive and negative consequences, facilitating and hindering factors, and effective collaboration. Below is a succinct summary of the results for each area, followed by points of discussion.

❖ **Terminology:**

The review delved into the diverse terminology used to describe teacher collaboration, revealing a nuanced landscape that captures the intricate dynamics of collaborative relationships among educators.

❖ **Focus and Depth:**

The examination of the focus and depth of collaboration underscored its multifaceted nature, indicating that collaborative efforts extend beyond mere cooperation to involve shared goals, mutual support, and a collective commitment to improving educational outcomes.

❖ **Positive and Negative Consequences:**

Positive consequences of teacher collaboration were evident in enhanced student learning, teacher professional development, and increased job satisfaction. On the flip side, challenges such as time constraints and resistance to change emerged as potential negative consequences.

❖ **Facilitating and Hindering Factors:**

Various factors were identified that either facilitated or hindered effective teacher collaboration. Positive factors included shared

vision, supportive leadership, and a positive school culture, while hindering factors encompassed time constraints, lack of resources, and resistance to collaboration.

❖ **Effective Collaboration:**

Effective collaboration emerged as a dynamic interplay of shared responsibility, open communication, and a collective pursuit of enhanced teaching and learning. The identified key components included collaborative planning, joint decision-making, and the cultivation of a supportive professional community.

• **Discussion:**

❖ **Limitations and Recommendations:**

While the review provides valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. One notable limitation is the focus primarily on teacher teams, with less explicit exploration of broader communities such as communities of practice or professional learning communities. This choice, while providing depth in understanding teacher collaboration, may have missed nuances present in broader educational communities.

❖ **Scope Expansion for Future Research:**

To address the limitation mentioned, future research could broaden the scope to explicitly include communities within educational settings. Exploring how collaboration functions within larger communities of practice or professional learning communities could offer a more comprehensive understanding of collaborative dynamics in the educational landscape.

❖ **Integration of Technology:**

As technology continues to play an increasing role in education, future research could delve into the impact of digital tools and virtual collaboration platforms on teacher collaboration. Understanding how technology

influences collaboration could provide insights into the evolving nature of collaborative practices in contemporary educational contexts.

❖ **Cross-Cultural Perspectives:**

Expanding the research to include cross-cultural perspectives on teacher collaboration could offer valuable insights. Exploring how collaboration is perceived and practiced in diverse cultural settings may reveal cultural nuances that influence collaborative dynamics.

❖ **Longitudinal Studies:**

Conducting longitudinal studies to track the evolution of teacher collaboration over time could provide a deeper understanding of its dynamics. Long-term investigations could shed light on the sustainability of collaborative efforts and the factors that contribute to their longevity.

❖ **Practical Implications:**

The findings of this review have practical implications for educational practitioners. Fostering a positive school culture, providing resources and time for collaboration, and cultivating supportive leadership are crucial for enhancing teacher collaboration. Implementing effective collaboration strategies can contribute to positive outcomes for both educators and students.

In conclusion, this systematic review advances our understanding of teacher collaboration across various dimensions. While acknowledging its limitations, the review opens avenues for future research and emphasizes the practical implications for educators and educational policymakers. The evolving landscape of teacher collaboration demands ongoing exploration to adapt to the changing needs of educational environments and to foster collaborative practices that positively impact student learning and teacher professional development.

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