Collaboration In Education:

It is a skill and we can learn how to do it

by

Katrina Lowe

Bachelor of Arts, Thompson Rivers University, 2010
Bachelor of Education, Thompson Rivers University, 2013

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTERS IN EDUCATION

in the Department of Education
COLLABORATION IN EDUCATION

© Katrina Lowe, 2017

Vancouver Island University

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without the permission of the author.

Supervisory Committee

Paige Fisher, Education
Supervisor

[Enter Name and Department, Example: Dr. Robert N. Tracey, (Department of English)]
Co-Supervisor or Departmental Member

[Enter Name and Department]
Departmental Member

[Enter Name and Department]
Outside Member

[Enter Name and Department]
Additional Member
Abstract

This study was conducted because of both a lack of literature on and practice in building cohesive teams and fostering collaborative skills among educators. Current pressure on educators to produce innovative curriculum design requires collaboration to become more sustainable. Although educators are encouraged, and sometimes even expected, to work together, not only are they not being shown how, but it is not even being acknowledged that collaboration is a skill that can (and should) be learned and improved upon. This qualitative study followed up with attendees of a workshop series on collaboration. This paper seeks to answer the question: How will engaging in the purposeful development of collaboration as a learned skill improve effectiveness within collaborative teams? Both interviews and focus groups were conducted to gather information from the participants about their collaborative experiences after having attended the workshop series. It was found that educators who attended the workshop series felt more effective in their collaborative experiences after having participated in the workshop series. Increased effectiveness was expressed in a variety of ways including improved awareness of self, understanding of teammates, trusting team environment, engaged team members, and capacity for both utilizing conflict effectively and overcoming personal conflict more easily. Considering much of the literature on team building and learning the skill of collaboration is directed towards other professional fields, mainly business, the activities and techniques offered in the workshop were modified, by the researcher, for educators. Educators have a lot to gain by engaging in the purposeful development of the skills of collaboration and can learn to work more effectively and sustainably together by doing so.
### Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee ............................................................................................................ ii
Abstract .................................................................................................................................... iii
Table of Contents .................................................................................................................. iv
List of Figures ...................................................................................................................... viii
Acknowledgments ................................................................................................................ ix
Chapter 1 : Introduction ........................................................................................................ 1
  Justification of the Study ...................................................................................................... 1
  Purpose of the Study ........................................................................................................... 3
  Research Question and Hypothesis ..................................................................................... 5
  Definition of Terms .............................................................................................................. 6
    Team .................................................................................................................................. 6
    Conflict ............................................................................................................................. 6
    Strengths and Gaps .......................................................................................................... 7
    Vulnerability Based Trust ............................................................................................... 7
    Effectiveness ................................................................................................................... 8
    Formative Assessment .................................................................................................... 9
    Brief Overview of the Study .......................................................................................... 9
Chapter 2 : Literature Review ................................................................................................ 11
  Making a Case for Collaboration ......................................................................................... 12
  The Importance of Trust ...................................................................................................... 20
  Conflict: Allowing us to be Autonomous yet also Accountable ........................................ 29
  Keeping Educators Driven and Intrinsically Motivated ................................................... 32
# List of Figures

| Figure 1-1-1 | Lencioni’s Conflict Continuum | 7 |
| Figure 2-1 | Hargreaves and Fullan's PLD Venn Diagram | 15 |
| Figure 2-2 | Simon Sinek's Golden Circle (2009, p. 37) | 26 |
| Figure 2-3 | Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument | 31 |
| Figure 3-1 | Planning Document Style Handout | 41 |
| Figure 3-2 | Homework from Day 1 | 42 |
| Figure 3-3 | Tool for charting group members’ personality types adapted from MBTI | 43 |
| Figure 3-4 | Conflict Profiling | 44 |
| Figure 3-5 | A Learning Agenda | 45 |
Acknowledgments

To my eternal motivator, friend, colleague, and mother April: because I everything I am today is due to the not so gentle nudging that you have been doing for the past thirty-four years. I owe it all to you. Endless thanks.

To my life-coach, best friend, and partner Tyler. Thank you for supporting me and cheering me on no matter how much more I decide to take on. I could not accomplish half of what I do if it weren’t for your patience and understanding.

I am grateful to my siblings, who have provided me with the best built in forever friends. Thank you to my sister for making sure that life is a good mix of work and fun. Thank you to my brother for not only constantly pushing all of my buttons, but also for personally installing them. The fact that you never let me get away with being just a little bit lazy keeps me on track. Thank you for my youngest brother for providing me with so much material to edit over the years: helping you to refine your work has contributed immensely to my abilities as a writer.

An overwhelming thanks to my father, without whom I would be nowhere. Thank you for always being there when I need you, and thank you for affording me the time and space to get this project completed. I couldn’t have done it without you.

A very special gratitude to my teaching partner Naomi. Thank you for your reassurance and for sharing with me my love of learning.

I am also grateful to my amazing task force team, Lisa, Katrina, Paul, and Karen. Having the opportunity to be at the same table as such brilliance inspires me constantly.

And finally, lastly but by no means last thank you Paige for keeping me on track and being my mentor from the beginning.
Thanks for all your encouragement!
Chapter 1: Introduction

Justification of the Study

“In this day and age of informational ubiquity and nanosecond change, teamwork remains the one sustainable competitive advantage that has remained largely untapped” (Lencioni, 2011, p. 3). For the first time in history, the province of British Columbia has recently engaged in the process of reinventing our entire curriculum simultaneously: all subjects, grades K-12. This new curriculum includes teaching students to be self-regulated learners who are capable of doing things like engaging in the process of inquiry, growth mindset, and coding, while educators themselves are just beginning to learn these same skills. It is because of this current inquiry based curriculum that educators, more than ever, are being encouraged and even expected to be capable of consistently engaging in collaboration with each other. In order to effect change and keep up to the standards we have set for ourselves in developing this new curriculum, schools can no longer remain a place where educators can be free to be stagnant in their learning, close their doors, and continue to do what they are comfortable doing: what they have always done. During the NOII 2017 symposium, Blye Frank—Dean of the Faculty of Education at The University of British Columbia—stated, “we need to become comfortable with the uncomfortable without ever becoming complacent” (Frank, 2017). It was this statement that reminded me of the fact that education is an ever-changing profession where a constant feeling of uncertainty and a willingness to try, and sometimes fail at, new things is necessary. Unless we continue working together and learning from each other we will never grow the profession as a whole. At her retirement dinner, a colleague stated that she wished she could have taught just one more year, so
that she could get it right. Working together and learning from each other is what will allow educators to keep working towards “getting it right” until the day they retire. In working as effective collaborative teams we will be able to hold each other accountable to shared learning goals, in a respectful and professional way, as well as to use our teams’ strengths and weaknesses together to create sustainable innovative growth and change.

Sea-to-Sky is a district that is small in regards to numbers, but large in regards to the amount of land it spans. Stretching from the former mining community of Britannia Beach all the way to the far reaches of Pemberton, School District #48 values professional autonomy. As a community, we are aware that individuals with a strong sense of autonomy and purpose are more engaged. As Pink reminds us, “if you want engagement, self-direction is better” (2010, p.88).

As a new teacher in this type of progressive district I have been fortunate enough to have been included in a variety of leadership opportunities. As a part of my research on collaboration it has been my goal to be a member of as many committees as I can effectively commit to. This all came about because of the first team I volunteered to be a member of. Because of the new curriculum, the ministry of education in BC has given School Districts a number of days to dedicate to curriculum implementation. Our district decided that we wanted these days to provide a professional learning opportunity that educators in the district could connect to all of their learning throughout the school year. It was important to us for these days to be a part of something bigger, so we decided to create a unified theme between this day, implementation day, and the district professional development day. This idea required a committee of representatives from all aspects of the district to be formed. There were principals, vice principals, new teachers, seasoned
teachers, senior administration, district representation, and union representation. This committee was big. When we first sat down as a group there were twelve people in the room and each one of them was keen to have a voice in the conversation. In this first meeting—where we were tasked with defining the largest area of need as well as what the area of greatest potential impact for the entire district would be — I observed that there were a lot of people in this room educated and passionate about education, but by the end of the meeting we had accomplished little. The meeting was largely unstructured and there were a variety of personality types in the room, some who dominated the air and others who never spoke up. Conversations led us down rabbit holes and we talked in circles about things that weren’t pertinent to the task. I left this meeting reflecting that while everyone in the room knew what they were talking about, as a group we didn’t know how to have an effective conversation. What is even more ironic is that as a group we concluded that teachers should have more time to work in teams to collaborate on innovative and change making projects.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the importance of educators purposely developing their collaboration skills. I feel that this can be accomplished first by realizing that collaboration is a skill that can be developed and secondly by working towards the development of that skill. My objective was to learn more about how professionals in other fields collaborate and to apply and adapt some of these techniques to the field of education. In classrooms educators understand the value of building community and fostering a healthy learning environment. Teachers make sure they understand their students’ needs and learning styles, yet rarely put the same value on or invest equal time
into doing this for themselves or with their co-workers. Recent changes to the curriculum in BC have included a shift in focus from content to self-regulated learning and the development of competencies. This change highlights our cultural value and belief that humans can learn to develop as individuals and that this sort of growth is becoming more valuable in our society than mere knowledge acquisition. It is because of this shift in thinking that educators today are more uncertain than ever before and because of this uncertainty it has become more crucial than ever that we model our values.

According to Simon Sinek (2011) “It’s not just WHAT or HOW you do things that matters; what matters more is that WHAT and HOW you do things is consistent with your WHY” (p. 166). If we are expecting our students to be comfortable making mistakes, then we need to show them that we are. If we are expecting our students to work together and develop as a team, then we need to show them that we do as well. If we expect our students to accept that life is a learning journey, then we need to show them that we are still on that journey as well.

As an educator living in the small town of Squamish B.C and teaching full time in the Sea-to-Sky School District, I can see the positive impact that effective collaboration could have on the lives of the educators around me, on the education the students in our classrooms are receiving, and on the community as it benefits from the growth-minded individuals graduating from our schools. Having been a part of many collaborative communities in these past few years, some effective and some less effective, it has become my desire to learn what makes an effective collaborative team and some strategies to best develop one. What is collaboration? The entire point of collaboration is both to work together to create a better product than an individual could have created
alone and to get more done in less time. How can we be sure that this is what is happening when we are working together on a project?

**Research Question and Hypothesis**

Due to the fact that I had become involved in several collaborative projects and had noticed a trend of untapped potential, I decided to create a workshop series that would offer teachers in my district the opportunity to learn some collaborative techniques that they could bring back to and use in their own settings. I was considering the question: How will engaging in the purposeful development of collaboration as a learned skill improve effectiveness within collaborative teams?

In this study, I developed and delivered the workshops to current collaborative teams of educators who wanted to participate, and then interviewed these teams to see if they thought that anything they had learned had been worthwhile and effective. I hypothesized that if I created a professional learning opportunity where teachers could engage in the pre-collaboration process with their teams, that they would become more efficient at managing their collaboration time and more able to be innovative in their curriculum design.

I believed that teams of educators who participated in my workshop series would have a better foundation for future collaborative work. I believed that participants would bring the activities and protocols developed in my workshop back to their own buildings and would notice their collaborative communities becoming more efficient as a result. I believed that by getting to know themselves and each other on a deeper level they would have an easier time working together.
Definition of Terms

Team

The word team can refer to a number of social constructs. A team can be defined merely as a group of individuals obligated to work in the same physical space, but for the purposes of this study “a team is a small number of people that shares common goals as well as the rewards and responsibilities of achieving them” (Lencioni, 2011, p. 19). The term teamwork is also used synonymously throughout the study with the word collaboration, or collaborators as the purpose of this study is to help teams of educators learn to be better teams of collaborators.

Conflict

People have different understandings of the word conflict and many of us assume that any and all conflict is something we don’t want to have, but for the purposes of this research I refer to conflict in terms of “productive ideological conflict, passionate unfiltered debate around issues of importance to the team” (Lencioni, 2011, p. 37). Conflict means that all of the people at the table are passionate about getting the best possible result by challenging each other and engaging in genuine curiosity in regards to one another’s ideas, beliefs, and values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artificial harmony</th>
<th>Conflict continuum</th>
<th>Personal attacks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On the one hand (left), many companies exhibit “artificial harmony”.</td>
<td>The optimal spot is just to the left of the middle,</td>
<td>On the right side, people can be downright nasty, constantly at each other’s”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1-1 Lencioni’s Conflict Continuum


Strengths and Gaps

The idea of having a gap in one’s knowledge is generally seen as a weakness and something that should not be admitted to. Whereas possessing a strength is something often attributed to one’s general nature and or genetics as opposed to what an individual has worked hard to obtain or learn. Strengths and Gaps as I refer to them in this study are areas of continuous learning where the experience and process is what is valued and not the product or end result. Timperley (2011) suggests that a gap is just the distance between where you are and where you want to be (p. 144). According to Carol Dweck (2008) on strengths “just because some people can do something with little or no training it doesn’t mean that others can’t do it, and sometimes do it even better with training” (p. 70).

Vulnerability Based Trust

Often when I speak about vulnerability based trust people confuse it with the idea of individuals allowing their emotions to pour out of them as they are feeling them. For the purposes of this study vulnerability based trust is a level of trust we gain from taking
the time to truly know one another and understand why our co-workers act the way that they do. In *Daring Greatly* Brene Brown (2012) introduces us to the idea that unless you are transparent, or “exposed” in the why of your actions, we cannot expect others to be with us. Throughout the book, Brown takes us through her journey in an effort to explain that while being vulnerable is sometimes scary, and usually uncomfortable, it does get easier with practice and is the only way to build trust. As she describes it:

Yes, we are totally exposed when we are vulnerable. Yes, we are in the torture chamber that we call uncertainty. And yes, we’re taking huge emotional risk when we allow ourselves to be vulnerable. But there is no equation where taking risks, braving uncertainty, and opening ourselves up to emotional exposure equals weakness. (Brown, 2012, p. 32)

**Effectiveness**

Effectiveness, for the purpose of this study, effectiveness is defined as self-identified increases in productivity in regards to collaboration times as identified by any individual who attended a workshop and/or an interview or focus group. These increases may include, but are not limited to, a more positive day to day social climate, efficiency experienced during collaboration time, and an increase in perceived successful curriculum development.

Challenges, for the purpose of this study, are defined as difficulties that arise in any part of the collaboration process. These may include time, financial constraints, willing partners, and buy-in from other educators and students.
Formative Assessment

Formative assessment includes a variety of formal and informal assessment procedures, including but not limited to conferencing, observations, interviews, and focus groups. Teachers, during the learning process, continuously conduct these assessments in order to inform their teaching style and curriculum design as a means of improving student learning.

Brief Overview of the Study

This study was a qualitative research study of nine educators in the Sea-to-Sky School District who chose to attend a workshop series designed to develop their collaboration skills. The superintendent of this School District, SD#48, was contacted and her permission was obtained in order to both deliver the workshop and to interview the participants about their experiences.

Two focus groups were held with staff members from two schools in the district. A total of seven district staff participated in these focus groups, including teachers, an administrator, a learning support teacher, and a Squamish Nation language and culture worker. These focus groups included questions about what the educators had been learning about professional collaboration, were asked how they thought their team was doing in regards to collaboration and what their next step would be. An additional question was asked regarding the potential for improvement on the workshop series. The goal of these focus groups was to assess to what extent participants felt the workshop series had been useful to them and how the knowledge gained and activities practiced had impacted their abilities to collaborate.
Additionally, four interviews were held with staff members from three schools in the district, all four classroom teachers, one the district professional development chair, another a learning support teacher, one teacher librarian, and two-part time district coordinators. These interviews included questions about reasons for attending the workshop series, expected outcomes, current learning, stand out moments from the workshops, and areas of future growth. The goal of these interviews was to gain some insight as to what individuals experienced in their collaborative teams after having attended the workshop series.

This study uses qualitative method approaches, as data is mainly experiential and qualitative in nature.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

“You cannot have students as continuous learners and effective collaborators, without teachers having the same characteristics” (Hargreaves, 1993, p. 46)

Throughout my life, I have noticed that in everything I produce, having another person around to work with, bounce ideas off of, and get feedback from almost always makes my product better. I enjoy having other minds around to challenge my bad ideas and reinforce my good ones. The cliché “two heads are better than one” has been playing on repeat in my brain, since before I can remember. Throughout my high school career, I always performed better on project work than I did alone, at the time I thought that was because I had an obligation to someone other than just myself to do well, but it wasn’t until I was taking my undergraduate degree that I began to dislike “group work”. Almost all of the coursework involved in my Bachelor of Education program was in some capacity group work, and for the first time I wished it wasn’t. The amount of work involved in designing and delivering curriculum was enough on its own. Being forced to collaborate with others on it (usually not peers of my choosing) just added pressure to the situation, and I wondered why. I understood teaching as an inherently creative profession and in my previous experience creative tasks had generally turned out better with more brains than just mine. It wasn’t until years later, sitting in another classroom, that I began to notice what had been going wrong up until this point.

In this classroom, I was assigned a group and a task, yet again, but this time there was no option for me to go it alone, there was not enough time and there was too much to be done. We would have to work together, divide and conquer as it were, and it was this experience that lead to my “aha moment” in terms of collaborative experiences. As a
COLLABORATION IN EDUCATION

group, we decided that we would focus on the process instead of on the product. We would try and figure this thing out to purely focus on and get as much learning as possible from the assignment; and we did.

These experiences are what has lead me to wonder if teachers are currently being taught how to work together, and if they aren’t is there something that could be designed that would help them to learn how? In my survey of the literature I have found that there is not much currently being done to specifically teach educators how to work together effectively, yet there is an increasingly high expectation for us to do so. Collaboration time is being incorporated into school calendars, and educators, realizing the value of collective minds working together and wanting to break free of the solitary confinement of their classrooms, are asking for more time still. Teachers are working together tirelessly on innovative curriculum re-design, but from what I have gathered from the literature, not many teams are taking the time to learn to work smarter rather than harder. In the world of business, organizations have been on board the team building train for years as they have realized that fostering a healthy team environment contributes directly to their bottom line. We have gotten to the point in education where there is too much work and not enough time to get it done alone. Collaboration is a skill that can be learned.

Making a Case for Collaboration

It was important for me to begin my research by looking deeply into what collaboration really means and how that meaning applies to the world of education. Recently Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan (2016) have been delving more deeply into the state of professional learning and development in education. In 2016 they
COLLABORATION IN EDUCATION

published a *Call to Action* outlining the success of, arguments against, and required actions to take in regards to teacher learning. Their findings state that “the quality of teaching is the most important in-school factor that affects student learning and achievement” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2016, p. 1) and go on to explain both the differences and the necessities for professional learning and professional development, and coining the term Professional Learning Development (or PLD). Figure 2.1 is a model of their PLD Venn diagram (p. 3), which illustrates how PLD fits into relation to the definitions of both professional learning and professional development. As they assert,

> The essence of our argument is that PLD, carefully defined, is at the heart of an effective and continuously growing teaching profession and, in turn, the best visions of it are rooted firmly in a system culture of collaborative professionalism that cultivates individual and collective efficacy. (p. 2)

and go on to explain that in order for education to continue to grow as a profession we have to work together to improve the entire profession. Fullan and Hargreaves advocate for system wide change and the spread of good new pedagogies mixed with a retention of good old pedagogies when they say that “it’s no use having brilliance if it is trapped in a pinhole camera of a classroom. Instead, we have to create floodlit systems where brilliance can exist anywhere and everywhere, all the time” (p. 9). They also affirm that teaching has become a profession that requires its professionals to be both highly educated and highly adaptive and in order to achieve that level of expertise we are going to need a culture of collaboration. In a recent draft document of a chapter from *Adaptive Expertise* Helen Timperley (2015) echoes Fullan and Hargreaves when she explains that 21st century educators are required to be adaptive experts, by being able to teach students
COLLABORATION IN EDUCATION

to solve problems we don’t even know exist yet. As she indicates, “Adaptive expertise demands one acquires deep conceptual understanding to enable the creation of new solutions to existing problems and innovative solutions to new ones” (p. 6). Timperley also agrees that education systems will not thrive as a whole by merely improving small groups of innovative and dedicated educators. Fullan, Hargreaves and Timperley all agree that individual educators, and even innovative School Districts cannot go it alone.

In order for educators to improve their practice, learning opportunities need to improve so that the entire profession can grow as a whole. Timperley (2015) also suggests that while professional learning and development are key, a few educated professionals within the field of education are not enough. Teachers need to be offered “professional learning opportunities that support teachers in making informed decisions regarding curriculum enactment that can benefit their learners” (p. 2). All educators within a system being offered quality professional learning opportunities is what Timperley suggests is what will lead to education being a profession full of adaptive experts. She suggests that educators should be adaptive enough to realize their position as having “critical roles as curriculum activists” (p. 3). It is with this call to action that Timperley reminds educators that they are experts in the field and the only ones capable of truly knowing and advocating for changes that need to be made. Timperley asserts that merely being passive recipients of learning is no longer enough to keep education current for students. In order to become deeper learners, students are being asked to become more self-regulated, project, problem, and inquiry based in their learning, and as Timperley suggests, educators need to change the way they learn and adopt these processes as well.

There has been a tradition of teachers being perceived as the recipients of
professional development. Professional development has been something that is done to rather than with teachers and which is planned by people other than teachers and brought to teachers with the implicit agenda that their teaching needs to be improved. (Timperley, 2015, p. 9)

Figure 2-1 Hargreaves and Fullan's PLD Venn Diagram

Building collaborative professional learning communities seems like an obvious and necessary option to respond to the important issues raised by these eminent scholars. Hargreaves and Fullan (2016) state that “it’s hard to argue against professional learning and development. Who could possibly be opposed to it? The only alternatives would be unprofessional ignorance and atrophy” (p. 11). They pose an interesting argument that leads me to wonder that if it is so obvious then why are we avoiding fixing the issue and continuing to work around it? Teachers are asking for more collaboration time “but more time for collaboration is insufficient by itself. The time has to be well spent.” (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016, p. 13). And although Fullan and Hargreaves don’t go on to explain
exactly that they mean by “well spent” they do suggest that, as a profession we need to work on our collective efficacy. It is vital, they assert, that teachers remember that we are on the same side and work together instead of competing against each other because who better to learn from than each other? Working together and sharing can only serve to improve the system as a whole for all stakeholders, so it is obviously in our best interest to do so, since we all have the same goals and priorities of improving student achievement in the end (2016).

Competition has become an increasingly prevalent aspect of our society. Individuals want to get ahead and have it better than those around them and it is because of this competitive nature that we are losing our abilities to be effective team members. On a team, everyone is on the same side and when the team does well, everyone on it does well, but individuals still crave more recognition than their teammates and in turn often withhold ideas, help, and even advice to achieve this. In *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey (2001) presents seven habits that he asserts will help individuals become more successful. One of those habits is to “think win-win” (p. 5). If we are constantly thinking of our interactions in life and in the workplace as win-win, we are practicing our skills as collaborators and developing them as a habit. Like Covey, Brown (2012) in *Daring Greatly*, discusses our cultural predisposition to compete with one another fueled by shame, comparison, and disengagement. She stresses our need to “create an organizational culture in a way that is fundamentally opposite to the cultural norms driven by scarcity, takes awareness, commitment, and work” (p. 29) and goes on to divulge her strategy of keeping a piece of paper in her wallet with the names of the people who matter to her on it (Brown, 2012, p. 171). This list is a useful strategy as we
are often stuck in shame or emotional reaction because of an interaction with someone whose opinion of us is irrelevant. In a collaborative team, it is important that our teammates opinions and ideas of us and the product we are creating together matter to us.

What could we do to have our teammates and collaborators on our lists? Daniel Goleman is the inventor of the notion of Emotional Intelligence (or EQ), asserting that it means more than IQ. In his book titled *Primal Leadership*, Goleman (2002) presents his audience with the idea that there are many different styles of leadership and that these various styles can all be useful in certain situations. In this book, Goleman presents us with the idea that everyone can and should be a leader and that effective leaders practice an affiliative style of leadership that promotes this same type or harmony. Affiliative-style leaders foster friendly interactions, rather than encouraging competition, and encourage personal relationships among team members in order to “expand the connective tissue with the people they lead” (p. 65). Like Goleman, Hargreaves and Fullan (2016) agree with this sentiment and propose a style of leading from the middle rather than top down or bottom up styles of leadership, implying that leadership doesn’t necessarily have to come from formal leaders but rather from a culture of collaboration and team members learning from each other and working together to solve problems.

Professional learning in Canada is one of the reasons that our education system is thriving. Educators are doing their best to work together, learn from one another, and improve their practice. In the *Executive Summary The State of Educators’ Professional Learning in Canada* (2016) the Learning Forward team took a deeper look at why Canada is reputed to be one of the most successful education systems in the world, and they stated that: “The Canada study findings indicate the value and prominence of a range
of collaborative professional learning opportunities within and across schools and wider professional networks” (p. 9) suggesting that teachers in Canada view each other as resources and are taking the time to learn with and from one another.

Although Canada has garnered this praise, there still many challenges to be faced. As stated in the Learning Forward report (2016) “there are challenges of time and supports for collaborative professional learning opportunities integrated within the working day and work lives of educators” (p. 9): these challenges are mainly time and money. Time has always been a challenge for educators as there is little time given for teachers to work and plan together and most of educators’ time is spent alone with their students in the classroom. Any time for professional learning, collaboration, or planning in general is difficult for educators to find and educators routinely volunteer their own time to work together. Working on evenings and weekends is a part of life of educators who wish to improve their practice, but this additional time often leads to strained learning time, as individuals become eager to get the work done and go home, or have difficulty arranging a time where they are all free to meet (Learning Forward, 2016, p. 11). The report goes on to show a glimmer of hope pointing out that despite this clear lack of support for educators to improve their practice in a way we can clearly see would be of benefit to the profession, there are districts and schools who have identified this as a problem and have been attempting to creatively address these issues. Unfortunately, “issues of time are not simply about number of hours dedicated to professional learning activities but also about the balance of overall time involved in teachers’ (and school system leaders’) daily work compared to time available for their own development” (p. 11). This report highlights the fact that educators are being expected to work together
under the pressure of getting things done, without being given the time and space to focus on their own learning. The report indicates that the main reason that education in Canada is seen as one of the most effective systems in the world is that educators here are keen to learn and grow and have been given the freedom to do so in a way that works for them, but still need more time and support to be able to do so effectively and sustainably.

Collaboration is a skill that can be learned, but also needs to be maintained and constantly improved upon in order to work effectively. Collaboration is difficult and often forces us to go against our natural tendencies. Slowing down in order to speed up is counter-intuitive, but with practice and attention to the matter it can be done. Patrick Lencioni in *Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (2010) stresses the importance of being able to work as a team in order to get “more done in less time with less cost” (p. 4) and goes on to express that teamwork isn’t just something you can or cannot do, it is something you need to build and constantly revisit in order to maintain, “Teamwork is extremely hard to achieve. It requires levels of courage and discipline, and emotional energy that even the most driven of executives do not possess” (p. 4). He also stresses the importance of learning the skill of teamwork by stating that teamwork is what is always lacking in organizations that fail and is always present in those that thrive. In chapter one of the book Lencioni (2010) discusses the typical resistance he gets when approaching a team that needs to stop and work on building their collaboration skills. He explains that many individuals have what he calls an “adrenaline addiction” (p. 90). People just want to get in there and get the work done, and oftentimes slowing down and taking the time to consider the process is too much for these individuals to handle. This point sheds some light on the point illustrated by the Learning Forward *Executive Summary* (2016) that
educators do not take enough time to focus on their own learning and spend much of the
time allotted for collaboration “getting things done”: focusing on the product rather than
the process and the learning.

The Importance of Trust

“Trust is a product of vulnerability that grows over time and requires work,
attention, and full engagement. Trust isn’t a grand gesture— it’s growing a
marble collection” (Brown, 2012, p. 53)

Just like teamwork, trust is something that can be built, maintained, and improved
upon over time. Trust is difficult to build and easy to break and in Overcoming the Five
Dysfunctions of a Team Lencioni (2010) begins this playbook style guide discussing the
first dysfunction of a team: the lack of trust (p. 10). He begins his discussion of trust by
explaining that the word trust is often misused and misunderstood and explains to the
audience what trust is and what it isn’t. According to Lencioni, trust is “a sense of
connection and belonging” (p. 4) and not, “the ability of team members to predict one
another’s behaviour” (p. 13). Team members who trust one another can be comfortable
being open with one another and are able to feel safe enough to take the sorts of risks that
often lead to mistakes. Making mistakes is crucial in the learning process and both
Lencioni and Brown stress the importance of safety in trusting relationships and how this
safety allows us to make important mistakes that we can learn from. Lencioni not only
explains the importance of trust in an effective team situation, but also offers some
strategies and activities for building trust within organizations such as the ‘personal
histories exercise’ where team members take turns answering three questions in order to
work towards overcoming the fundamental attribution error which is, “The tendency to
falsely attribute the negative behaviours of others to their character, while attributing one’s own negative behaviours to environmental factors” (p. 145). With this statement, he illustrates his opinion that trust is difficult to achieve with a lack of empathy and empathy is difficult to achieve with a lack of knowing both oneself and one’s teammates. He also points out that understanding one’s own identity is key to understanding others. In *Empathy: Why it Matters and How to get it* Roman Krznaric (2014) argues that our brains are wired for social connection and that empathy is natural. He points out that looking outward and identifying with the experiences of others is the only way to become more productive individuals because “Our well-being depends on us stepping out of our own egos and into the life of others, both people close and distant strangers” (p. 30). He remarks that within today’s societal values are self-improvement and self-love, while Lencioni asserts that in order to understand others an individual first needs to understand oneself. Krznaric suggests the opposite is true by proposing that engaging empathetically with others is the only way to improve ourselves. He maintains that individuals can practice empathy in a variety of ways similar to how Lencioni’s assertion that individuals can practice trust.

Krznaric, Lencioni, and Brown all agree that both learning to work together and learning to work on ourselves are important. While Krznaric maintains that we are currently living in an epidemic of narcissism, where individuals are constantly asking the question “what’s in it for me?” Brene Brown in *Daring Greatly* (2010) states that narcissism is not the problem, but rather a lack of vulnerability. She explains that if we look at what we see as narcissism through a lens of shame we can stop allowing people to distance themselves from their problems. She suggests that because we have begun to see
our problems as a part of our identities, we are no longer seeing them as something we can work on, but rather a fixed aspect of our personalities. Dweck corroborates this idea in *Mindset: The new psychology of success* (2008), where she details the differences between a fixed and a growth minded person. According to Brown, naming the shame or the problems individuals are having is the key to growth, a stuck individual is unable to name their problems as they are unable to admit to having them. Dweck would call this person “fixed minded” and discusses how a fixed minded person is constantly trying to prove their worth, while a growth minded person is constantly trying to grow their worth. Because a fixed minded individual is often trying to look good they are usually unable to be vulnerable and thus will have more difficulty both earning and developing trust within their teams. Just like Lencioni in his definition of the fundamental attribution error, Brown and Dweck want us to realize that by seeing problems as inherently negative characteristics we are affording ourselves the opportunity of dehumanizing these problems. Brown argues that it would be effective for individuals to take notice that there has been a cultural shift towards a desire for an extraordinary life: everyone wants to be different and special. Dweck asserts that it is this desire to be naturally talented, different, special, or extraordinary that stunts individual’s growth. If we are to improve upon ourselves in a way that allows us to improve our relationships with others, we must first recognize that our tendencies and preferences aren’t just the way we are, but rather that these gaps in our abilities are something we are working on improving. Being vulnerable about one’s areas of growth and open about where our gaps are being the only way to begin to build a culture of trust and learning within a team. Brown goes so far as to state that by taking a “look at narcissism through the vulnerability lens, we can see the shame-
In *Daring Greatly* (2010) Brown delves deeply into the topic of shame and the effect it has on our lives and our relationships, but also points out that vulnerability and openness take the away the power shame has over our lives. She admits that the challenges she speaks of that scare everyone also scare her and admits to having to constantly remind herself to be vulnerable in order to learn and grow. Brown is not advocating for what I like to call emotional vomit though, she states clearly that “vulnerability without boundaries leads to disconnection, distrust, and disengagement” (p 46) while explaining that vulnerability is based on mutuality, and that it requires boundaries and trust: something you must grow and maintain. Vulnerability is about sharing our feelings and our experiences with people we trust and she cautions about sharing appropriately. In this book, Brown discusses the importance of personal boundaries and how important it is to be aware of, vocal about and respectful with them to be more respected and happier in both our social and work lives. In order to learn to work together, it is essential to first learn how to work on ourselves and how to share that work with our team. To build an effective team, it is essential to build trust and in order to build and maintain trust we must first identify our own personal gaps and then be transparent in our work towards closing them.

Emotional self-awareness is something that can not only be learned and developed, but also must be a feature of our everyday lives if we are to learn to work together in a way that all team members feel trusted and free of judgement. In *Emotional Intelligence* (1995), Daniel Goleman advocates for a greater sense of self-awareness and a deeper understanding of one’s own current emotional status. He describes emotional self-awareness as being both aware of our mood, or emotional state, as well as our
COLLABORATION IN EDUCATION

thoughts and feelings about that mood. In *Social Intelligence* (2006), Goleman reminds us of this idea of self-awareness and goes onto explain how it is this self-awareness that allows us to navigate social relationships work together more effectively. Like Brown, Goleman advocates for a greater understanding of self, asserting that by a person thinking about why one is feeling what they are feeling as they are feeling it, or naming the mood, individuals are more capable of acting in a way that is congruent with their personal values. He asserts that “Self-awareness— recognizing a feeling as it happens, an inability to notice our true feelings leaves us at their mercy. Managing emotions— handling feelings so they are appropriate is an ability that builds on self-awareness” (p. 43). Often individuals who are in a bad mood act a way that they regret later. Goleman suggests that by thinking about the mood and the feelings being experienced while they are being experienced, an individual will be more likely to avoid this type of regret and become the person they want to be. In *Social Intelligence* (2007), Daniel Goleman extends this idea by stating that “while we typically know what has triggered an outright emotion, we often find ourselves in one mood or another without knowing its source” (p. 18) showing us how important it is to know ourselves in order to interact with others. He explains that in order to be in rapport we must first know ourselves so that together we can become more creative and effective in our decision-making abilities. In Goleman’s *Primal Leadership* (2002) he brings together the ideas of emotional intelligence and leadership by focusing on the difference between dissonance and resonance in the workplace when he describes the social and emotional climate as key to creating a work environment by explaining that in order to understand others one must first understand one’s self (p. 57). In this book, Goleman focuses on the leader and their abilities to create a healthy work environment.
Goleman asserts that in order to have an effective team the workplace needs to be one where individuals feel trusted, and free to take creative risks.

In *Start With Why* (2011) Simon Sinek echoes Goleman's stance that a leader’s primary responsibility is to creating a resonant workplace by stating that “great leaders are able to inspire people to act. Those who are able to inspire give people a sense of purpose or belonging… those who truly lead are able to create a following of people who act not because they were swayed, but because they were inspired” (p. 6). In this book, Simon Sinek seeks to illuminate the importance of starting with why and understanding purpose before moving to action. He argues that for an organization to be trusted the reason for their being needs to be apparent, and every decision made needs to reflect that reason for being. Sinek uses many famous companies such as, Apple, Southwest Airlines and Disney to prove his point that acting with purpose is a key ingredient to success in business, but what does that mean in terms of education? In Figure 2.2 Sinek illustrates the organizational hierarchy between the why, the how, and the what. He uses this model as a visual for discovering an organization’s why. He argues that individuals buy into the why of an organization before they even consider buying into the what. Just like in business, if a school’s why is not apparent to the staff, then it will not be apparent to the students and parents (or the clients in business terms) and all stakeholders may have a different interpretation of what that school values above all.
In order to find a team’s why it is necessary to be purposeful in the building of trust. Our why in education is important and in the world of education we state our why as often as we can, but I wonder if we are doing as Sinek suggests and purposely making decisions with our why in mind. If our why is as Linda Kaser and Judy Halbert (2009) put it, “every learner crossing the stage with dignity, purpose, and options” then what are we doing as a collective that reflects that why, and how are we going about enacting this purpose? In *Leadership Mindsets* (2009), Kaser and Halbert point out that “most educators acknowledge that they consider trusting relationships to be important in creating positive school cultures. Fewer are able to identify the key role trust plays in actually improving student learning” (Kaser & Halbert, 2009, p. 44). So as Sinek would say, most teachers know the way, but are unclear on the why and how. Just like Brown, Lencioni, and Dweck, Sinek, Kaser and Halbert talk of the importance of trust in an organization. Sinek asserts that without a clear and shared purpose and set of values we cannot begin to build trust while Kaser and Halbert explain how important trust in all aspects of leadership in education. Kaser and Halbert believe that formal leaders are not the only influential leaders in education and are known for their “take your hat off at the
door” mantra. In the book, *Leadership Mindsets* (2009) they reinforce this belief by telling real life stories from schools that displayed a lack of trust, gained trust, and displayed high levels of trust throughout their buildings, and with a variety of leadership roles. They also explain some of the ways that trust can be lost in a school setting.

Teachers are typically problem solvers and often have a tendency to try and fix the problems of others before “genuinely understanding the problem context” (p. 48). They go on to assert that taking the time to understand problem contexts are important aspects of growth for a leader who is motivated to build trusting relationships” (p. 48). Kaser and Halbert don’t leave us without resources though and go on to outline ways in which trust can be gained back advocating for communication, openness, and vulnerability. In other words, trust is built slowly and purposefully, but is necessary for all leadership roles within education. All educators both need to trust and feel trusted by their leaders. Kaser and Halbert value professional learning in education above all else and realize that just like students, teachers learn best and are engaged the most when they are given autonomy over their own learning and are able to apply it in ways that are authentic to them and their situations. Teachers and teams of teachers feel trusted when they are given this level of autonomy as it is what allows them the freedom to take creative risks and innovate free of judgement.

Trust is essential if we desire innovation and creativity, but trust is reciprocal. A leader cannot demand trust without first knowing and being known by her team, just as a teacher cannot demand trust from their class before taking the time to both get to know and to be known to her students. Building trust is a slow process of not just getting to know the other, but also being vulnerable and transparent enough to be known. Dan
Pontefract in *Flat Army* (2013), speaks about employee engagement, pointing out how many employees are disengaged with their work by relaying a story of when he was a young high school teacher. He describes a situation in which teachers were sitting around the staff room table in October dreaming about summer vacation. Dan Pontefract’s point is that employees cannot be engaged if there is no clear understanding of why they are doing what they are doing and if there is freedom of creativity with which to drive their passions. Pontefract asserts that in order for a workforce to feel engaged they must first feel trusted by their employers to make the decisions they believe are the right ones for their own situations. Since trust is reciprocal the employer must be the first to give it and the first to make themselves known to their team as an employee cannot have trust for their employer if it is not first given to them. Kaser and Halbert (2009) maintain that “the individual or group with the most power had to express vulnerability first… by expressing vulnerability, a foundation for trust building can be created” (p. 54) and Pontefract agrees. Throughout the book, he outlines the idea that trust is reciprocal and that in order for a team to trust their leader they need to feel that the leader believes that they will do their jobs to the best of their abilities. Sinek and Pontefract agree that in order for a culture of creativity and innovation to thrive team members must first know why they are doing what they are doing, and then feel trusted to do so in the way they feel is the most effective. In the Pontefract Participative Leader Framework he maintains that leaders need to act in the way they expect their employees to and that every day a leader should be interacting with their team in order to build unique and personalized relationships with each individual. Pontefract also advocates for humor in the workplace arguing that “a true community of practice is made up of local lore, shared stories, inside
jokes, and knowing laughter” (Pontefract, 2013, p. 107) and adding that trusting someone is about acting in a trusting and knowing manner. Employees and stakeholders want to feel like they are a part of enacting the why of an organization, and just like our students they crave a personal connection with their leader. Pontefract’s idea of building local lore and making space for humor in the workplace is a technique he offers to go about building these types of relationships. In the participative leader framework, Pontefract outlines how he sees an involved leader interacting with her team. He asserts that a continuous, authentic, reciprocal, and educational environment is key to creating a culture of trust and engagement.

Trust is an important aspect of both personal and team growth. Building trust is not easy and takes time and a deeper understanding of one’s own emotional state. Trust is built in a variety of ways and is maintained only through a focus on growth. Individuals, and especially leaders, who are focused on proving themselves and their worth will not be able to build lasting trust with their team.

Conflict: Allowing us to be Autonomous yet also Accountable

“Good conflict among team members requires trust, which is all about engaging in unfiltered passionate debate around issues” (Lencioni, 2010, p. 50).

The ability to engage in productive conflict with one’s team is achieved only by building trusting relationships within that team. The purpose for collaboration is for many minds to come together to produce a product that one mind could not have conceived of on its own. In order to attain a level of innovation and creativity, conflict is necessary. A team who has difficulty disagreeing with one another will be unable to reach consensus, make decisions, or engage in debate over best possible courses of action. In Patrick
Lencioni’s *Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (2010) he explains that not engaging with conflict is more detrimental to building vulnerability based trust than the conflict itself is. He begins the chapter again by explaining what he means by conflict in terms of classifying what it is not when he states that conflict is not “politics, pride, and competition rather it is the humble pursuit of truth” (p. 37). Lencioni expresses his view that conflict is a good thing and an organization cannot have effective collaboration without it. He, like Dan Pontefract, believes that disengagement in the workplace is where organizations are failing, but Lencioni argues that this lack of engagement stems from a lack of good conflict. As he says, “If team members are not making on another feel uncomfortable at times, by pushing each other out of their ‘emotional comfort zones’ it is likely that they are not making the best decisions for the organizations” (p. 38).

Lencioni offers activities and practices for organizations to use in order to help to get everyone on the same conflict page and suggests the use of a conflict continuum where individuals can vocalize what level of conflict they are comfortable with. One tool that he recommends is the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974) (Figure 2.4) for individuals to self-identify what type of conflict tendencies they have and what type of conflict is useful in specific situations. The conflict continuum depicts the full conflict spectrum of any organization, from artificial harmony (zero conflict) to aggressive and destructive politics (p. 39). In this chapter Lencioni suggests that discussing our conflict preferences can be the most useful thing an organization does to inspire healthy and engaged conflict. He asserts that self-identifying and publicly declaring one’s personal outlook on dealing with conflict can help people to both become more aware of their own preferences and more willing to bend them to meet the needs of
the team, develop norms, and accommodate the preferences of others (p. 42).

Figure 2-3 Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument

According to Brené Brown in *Daring Greatly* (2010), healthy conflict and useful feedback begin where our tendency to blame ends and we need to begin by normalizing discomfort to shift the perception of conflict from blame to feedback. As she says, “Blame is simply the discharging of pain and discomfort. We blame when we’re uncomfortable and experience pain” (p. 195). Sinek (2011) states similar opinions in regards to feedback and conflict when he explains that by focusing on growth and learning a person is competing against themselves rather than others. He points out that no one wants to help an individual who is seen as competing against everyone else, while everyone wants to help the person who is seen as competing against themselves (p. 223).
This same idea is also illustrated in Stephen Covey’s *the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (2011) when he discusses his first habit of being proactive (p. 5). He explains that proactive people focus on what they can control, while reactive people “focus on the weakness of other people, the problems in the environment, and circumstances over which they have no control” (p. 79). Covey’s seven habits of highly effective people allow us to see that by understanding ourselves better and focusing purely on what we can control, conflict can become a driver for productivity rather than a vehicle for dissent.

Conflict is necessary in collaboration between educators as it is crucial that individual educators are engaged in the planning process. Educators share a common goal of creating the best possible learning environment for the students in their care. If educators desire to plan with innovation and creativity it is integral to get the thoughts, opinions, and ideas of our entire collaborative team on the table so that it is possible to sort through them and choose the best possible course of action in creating new curriculum.

**Keeping Educators Driven and Intrinsically Motivated**

“*Work consists of what a body is obliged to do and play consists of what a body is not obliged to do*” (Pink, 2009, p. 34).

Getting educators engaged in the team they are on and not just in the team that they lead is what will allow innovative and creative curriculum design to thrive. If a teacher is asked who they feel the most obligated to, their classroom or their collaborative team, most teachers will say their classroom. While the classroom is where the students are and they are ultimately who education serves, if we are to engage in successful collaborative teams, we must find a way to feel the same sense of obligation towards our
teammates as we do to our students. In British Columbia educators have control over their own professional learning and because of this it is important to maintain our engagement and the authenticity of this learning. Just like students, if educators are not interested in what they are learning, or how they are learning they will not be able to adapt this learning to their own situations. Many family members and friends of educators complain that when you get two teachers in a room you will end up having a hard time steering the conversation away from education. Teachers are constantly looking for new and better ways to do what they do, but the world and the curriculum are changing. Educators have always looked for ideas from one another, but planning together is becoming more and more of a necessity than ever before. Educators are engaged in their own learning, but how many of them are really on real collaborative teams who co-plan, co-teach, and co-assess? In his 2009 book Drive Dan Pink discusses what he calls the third drive. He explains that while proverbial carrots and sticks have worked to motivate individuals in the past 21st century tasks are typically beyond rudimentary. He explains that basic extrinsic motivators are effective when it comes to the most basic of tasks, but as soon as even the most basic cognitive ability is required, these motivators actually hinder output—especially creative output—rather than help it. Pink goes on to describe what he calls “flow: the state of optimal challenge” (p. 112) where an individual is able to find the fun of mastering the challenge of a problem. He argues that in order for us to find this state of flow and solve more complex problems humans have a need to feel safe to experiment in order to find new solutions (p. 60). Pink argues against control and for autonomy. In Drive Pink proposes three main drivers of intrinsic motivation, which is what he indicates allow us to work at our best, 1) Purpose:
“We are intrinsically motivated purpose maximizers, not extrinsically motivated profit maximizers” (p. 31) 2) Mastery: the desire to grow and improve in an area of study and 3) Autonomy: self-directed creative work that is interesting and ever changing. Carol Dweck in *Mindset* (2008), echoes Pink when she points out that “many growth minded people didn’t even plan to go to the top, they got there as a result of doing what they love. It’s ironic, the top is where the fixed mindset people hunger to be, but it’s where many growth minded people end up as a bi-product of their enthusiasm for what they do” (p. 48). In *Mindset* Dweck seeks to prove that there are two different mindsets 1) the fixed mindset: the belief that your abilities are inherent and it is impossible to overcome personality flaws or 2) a growth mindset: the belief that your abilities are flexible and can be cultivated through effort and strategy (2008, p. 7). Dweck asserts that, ironically, the learning itself is the gift. Dweck’s research indicated that you can’t just sit in a seat and grow smart, and that hard work is what makes you smarter. Daniel Pink states that learning and ‘Goldilocks’ tasks (not too easy and not too hard) are the key to engagement. If a hard-working team achieving a state of flow is the goal educators are aiming for, how could we go about achieving that goal in terms of teacher professional learning and curriculum design? Educators have realized that students need to be interested in what they are learning in order to truly take ownership over their own learning, and teachers are the same; in order for individuals to buy-in and commit to a cause, to achieve a growth mindset, and to become intrinsically motivated they need to first be able to experience trust, and conflict.

**Conclusion**

For fun, I crochet, sew, or work on a variety of textile arts and the notion of best
practice reminds me of when I make a mistake in my work. Sometimes I notice right away and pull it out to fix it before getting too much further, and sometimes I don’t notice until I am almost finished and I basically have to undo everything to resolve the error I made in the beginning. It is at this point that I am faced with three options: 1) Pull apart all of the work I have done, fix the problem and start again 2) try and adjust for the problem without undoing everything I have worked so hard on or 3) toss the entire thing and start again. The review of the literature has given me an idea of why education is at the point where we can no longer try and adjust for the issue we created earlier on (creating space for educators to close their doors and getting the job done alone) and now we need to pull it all out and start again. The literature has confirmed my previous belief that education is a different profession than it was in the past and the effort we are currently putting into our practice is not sustainable. We are at a point where we need to learn to work together more effectively in order to “get more work done in less time” (Lencioni, 2010, p. 90) and the literature on teamwork, trust, conflict, and drive has given me a better sense of what will be necessary to include in my research.

My workshop series will focus on helping teachers to build their collaboration skills, and while the literature I surveyed focused either on collaboration (or teamwork), or on educational reform, nothing I was able to find overtly put the two together. This limitation within the literature I surveyed has encouraged me to develop something for an area of need. Much of the literature on educational reform has made a strong case in terms of the need for increased teacher collaboration, and much of the literature on teamwork expresses the need to build a culture of collaboration and teamwork before the process can get easier and more effective.
I am hoping that my research will confirm this notion of team building in the field of education. My hope is that future educators will realize this area of need and will be able to participate in workshops like mine in order to build teams in a way that will allow members to build trust, engage in effective conflict, and be driven to achieve the best results possible.
For the purpose of this study I chose to develop a workshop series and then follow up with the participants of the series in order to explore the following research questions: By engaging in the purposeful development of collaboration as a learned skill can educators improve effectiveness within their collaborative planning teams? What is the experience of workshop participants as they seek to apply learning obtained from a collaboration in education workshop series in their professional setting? It was my hope that after participating in this workshop series team members would find collaborating easier and more effective than they had previously.

**Research Design**

The aim of this study was to work with teachers in an attempt to hone their collaboration skills within their collaborative teams by creating a series of workshops where teachers would be offered the opportunity to attend and learn some collaborative skills. B.C.’s renewed curriculum has given educators the freedom to plan in authentic ways that makes sense for themselves and for their students. Because so much has changed in so little time I have observed many educators feeling both overwhelmed while designing curriculum and assessments and working in unsustainable ways in attempts to “re-invent the wheel”. In order to become the educators, we strive to be, and deliver the curriculum to the standards we have set out for ourselves, it is necessary for us to work together in order to avoid burnout, stagnation, or reverting to outdated and comfortable ways of doing things. Effective collaboration is a skill that can be learned and practiced, but it isn’t just about getting more done in less time, it’s also about producing the most innovative product we can, using the strengths of all of our teammates to contribute to the
best of their abilities. If educators continue to engage in collaboration without first
cultivating the skills to do so, collaboratively planning assessments and implementation
of curriculum will not be the more efficient or effective way of doing things and will
instead only contribute to the feeling of being overwhelmed, overworked, and ineffective.

In School District #48 (Sea-To-Sky) teachers have been encouraged to work as
part of collaborative teams for quite some time now, and for things like curriculum
implementation days as well as various professional learning development days and
implementation days, they have been asked to sign up and arrive as members of those
teams. Because of this, educators in the district were familiar with the concept of being a
part of a longer-term team working together on designing various projects, but as a
colleague once put it “they tell us to arrive in our teams, give us time and physical space
to collaborate and expect magic to happen”.

In the district, we also have opportunities to receive release time to be a part of an
inquiry group. These inquiry groups meet several times during the year and are expected
to collaborate on an innovative learning opportunity, both for themselves, and for their
respective students. Inquiry teams meet to share their learning at the end of the year and
typically work for just one school year with this team on this particular project, although
there are opportunities to continue the learning into subsequent years. Because of this
when I proposed the opportunity of participating in workshops designed to learn more
about the skill of collaborating and asked educators to attend in their pre-existing
collaborative teams, I was met both with significant interest as well as an understanding
of what I meant.
For this study, I was interested in offering an opportunity that I hoped would be valuable to these teams of educators and then following up with them to see if they had chosen to use anything that they had learned or had felt that this new knowledge and/or skill base had improved their effectiveness when collaborating with their colleagues.

**Method**

The first thing I set about doing for this study was developing my workshop series entitled “Collaboration as a Learned Skill”. I did this by first reviewing the literature to see what had been done in the past in education as well as what had worked well for professionals in other fields. In finding that the business world had been working hard to create a culture of teamwork and fostering collaborative communities for a very long time, most of what I used in my workshop were techniques and activities that had been widely used and tested within the business field. I also took a deeper look into the literature to discover how educators typically are expected to work together, as well as the general logistics of when we are capable of fitting these types of activities into an average school year. Unlike many business professionals, teachers spend the majority of their work day away from their colleagues yet are expected to find time to co-plan, co-design, and co-assess on their own time. The intention of the strategies and activities offered in my workshop series had to be such that they lessened the workload of educator rather than increasing it.

After designing the workshop series, I set about surveying for interest among my colleagues in School District #48. I am the professional development representative for my building so I began by sending out a survey to all other professional development representatives throughout the district and asking them to pass it on. This survey included
general questions about interest on the topic, dates and times that worked well, and dietary preferences as I planned to host the workshops in the evening and intended to serve food. The responses I got were overwhelmingly positive and quite a few individuals and teams expressed interest. Unfortunately, because the workshop series was an evening time commitment, many interested parties were not able to attend, but have expressed interest in doing so in the future.

The workshop series consisted of three two hour sessions, facilitated by me, that were designed to give teams the tools to collaborate more effectively in the future. These sessions focused on team building strategies and techniques educators would be able to use and take back to their own settings to help them to collaborate more effectively in the future. Another intention for these workshops was to help teachers to learn more about each other and themselves as a way of discovering how to use team members’ strengths and gaps to create sustainable and innovative growth.

**The Workshop Series**

In the three-part workshop series, I decided to use Patrick Lencioni’s *Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (2010, p. 6) as a model for what I wanted the participants to learn.

1. Absence of trust
2. Fear of Conflict
3. Lack of Commitment
4. Avoidance of Accountability
5. Inattention to Results
Because our district has created a curriculum planning document that many collaborative teams are familiar with and comfortable using I decided to use this planning document, shown in Figure 3.1, for my workshop outline and handed it out to participants to look over before we began.

Since the first dysfunction, according to Patrick Lencioni (2010), is the absence of trust, and I had a feeling that this was one of the places that educators lacked experience in obtaining, I decided to start with a brief synopsis of the research as it pertains to trust and vulnerability and then move straight into working through some activities. I have noticed in my survey of the literature that key ingredients to building trust are developing a greater understanding of our own identity, practicing vulnerability, and exercising boundaries. Subsequent workshop activities included techniques and strategies to help individuals and groups work towards a greater understanding of themselves and each other in these areas.
As shown in Figure 3.2, on day two of the workshop series I sent the attendees home with some homework. We had spent some time on the first day taking a test similar to the MBTI and on a copy of Figure 3.3 each group had charted their types. I asked them to come prepared to share a few key aspects of their personality preferences with their groups.

**Figure 3-2** Homework from Day 1
We began the session with this discussion and then quickly moved onto the subject of the day: conflict. In the teaching profession where during the workday (while students are in school) tensions run high, my sense is that teachers often don't understand the difference between engaging in effective conflict and bickering and therefore avoid conflict at all cost. This generally results in a state of artificial harmony. It is rare that we have a lot of time to sit down together and debate the important issues and our beliefs around the profession of education as a whole. Even our staff meetings are largely dedicated to logistic affairs rather than issues of learning and values. Because I saw this as a specific area of need, day two was dedicated entirely to the subject of conflict. Using the slide from Figure 3.4 as a guide, the group discussed the literature, identified our individual conflict preferences, and discussed creating team conflict profiles.
In day three of the workshop series it was important for me to at least discuss the last three dysfunctions of a team (according to Lencioni, 2010), but I really wanted to focus on paying attention to results. Where was, each group going as a team, what were their collective strengths and gaps? Figure 3.5 is the slide I used as a visual to help explain what I meant by a learning agenda.
Teachers are constantly measuring their students’ successes, so I wanted to give them tools to be able to measure both their own successes and areas of need. For this I had adapted a tool from a workshop I attended given by Helen Timperley on adaptive expertise. The tool, a graphic organizer created as a way of measuring the success of any group of teachers’ particular learning target, was modeled after the *Spirals of Inquiry* (2013) by Linda Kaser and Judy Halbert. Teams were instructed to fill in the boxes of the template as a way of visually representing their collaborative learning journey.

At the end of the workshop I read my recruitment script aloud and informed attendees that I would be emailing them and asking them to volunteer as participants in my research study. I informed them that the study would consist of a focus group with the members of their team as well as an individual interview with me where I would ask them briefly about the learning and how they had implemented some of the strategies in their own settings and with colleagues that had not attended the workshop series. I also
informed them that participation in the study was completely voluntary and their workshop attendance by no means obliged them to participate.

For the study, I was interested in hearing the voices of as many participants as possible. I was able to host two focus groups of teams currently participating in collaboration with each other, but because some educators had attended the workshop series as individuals rather than as a part of a collaboration team I was able to host interviews with several of these individuals as well.

**Methodology**

My study included focus groups from two different school based teams, and five individual participants. The research was entirely qualitative in nature as it dealt primarily with the experiences of educators having participated in the workshop series. I chose a case study method of qualitative research for my study as I was concerned with a more holistic approach of the material I was offering. As indicated by Brikci and Green (2002), qualitative research is “characterized by its aims, which relate to understanding some aspect of social life”. Because the point of this study was to better understand the experiences of those who attended the workshop series, qualitative research was the logical choice for this study. It was my intention to use this method to discover what about the workshop was useful, what was less useful, and why. According to Willis in *Qualitative Research Methods in Education and Educational Technology* (2008), a case study method calls for several methods of data collection in order to obtain a good understanding of what is happening in the bigger picture. In education, we know that formative assessment gives the educator the clearest picture of what’s going on for the learning with the whole child, and often even with the class, learning group, or school.
Because this study was conducted to inform the future teaching style and instructional material needed to improve learning, it felt necessary to conduct the research in this way. The study was entirely qualitative in order to allow the participants the freedom to contribute to the research in the ways that worked best for them as individuals.

**Procedures Followed**

A qualitative synthesis of the literature allowed me a sense of what I wanted my workshop series to look like. After compiling a variety of activities, talking points, and take-home strategies into a six-hour presentation I presented my product to the superintendent of district #48. With her approval, I completed my ethics application and begun planning times to host the workshop. Upon receiving approval from the ethics board at Vancouver Island University, I hosted the workshop in a three-part series over the course of a month, and in June (at the very end of the school year) I made plans to host the focus groups and interviews. It was important to wait until the very end of the school year to discuss the various participant’s experiences as I wanted to gather data from as long of a period of time as I could.

**Instruments Used**

My study included two different methods of obtaining data. The first was through focus groups. Two focus groups were held on Squamish B.C. The focus groups were held with a variety of district staff. Both focus groups began with a brief check in circle (following our district circle protocol) in order to allow participants to feel more comfortable in the setting, then a total of four questions were asked (Appendix A) and answers were typed in the form of notes taken by the researcher (myself) on the
researcher’s laptop. These questions were adapted from the scanning section of Linda Kaser and Judy Halbert’s *Spirals of Inquiry* (2013). I was trying to follow DuFour’s (2004) advice when he stated that “The collection and gathering of evidence must be done with care to avoid being data rich and information poor” (p. 147). A powerful way to gather evidence is by using the four key questions from the *Spirals of Inquiry* handbook, but I omitted the first question as I was dealing with adult professionals and not students. The three questions as they appear in the *Spirals of Inquiry* (Kaser & Halbert, 2013) are as follows:

1. What are you learning and why is it important?
2. How is it going with your learning?
3. What are your next steps? (Kaser & Halbert, 2017, p. 20)

I decided to modify these existing “data rich” questions because they are where I generally begin when assessing my students’ engagement, purpose, and level of mastery with a topic. I also asked for some feedback about how to improve the workshop series in the future.

My second method of data collection was individual interviews, which were audio recorded and later transcribed, both by the researcher (myself). These interviews included ten questions designed to allow myself to dig more deeply into the experiences of the participants. Questions were written in a way as to elicit open ended answers. I avoided using wording that might influence the answers (such as judgmental wording), and all questions were worded clearly as to avoid ambiguity (Turner, 2010, p. 757). The questions to be asked both in the interview and in the focus groups were sent out with the
email correspondence ahead of time as to allow participants time to feel mentally prepared.

**Sampling Strategies**

The sampling strategy used was a convenience sampling. District staff that had the time and interest to participate in the workshop series and then the focus group and interview process were chosen. Since all district staff was invited a wide variety and representation of district staff was able to participate.

**Participants**

All educators working in SD #48 (Sea-to-Sky) were given the opportunity to join in on the series of workshops offered. Educators in the district were invited to attend in pre-existing collaborative teams to work on getting to know each other better, cultivating their skills as collaborators, building a culture of teamwork and sharing, as well as working together to create protocols, scoreboards, and conflict action plans.

Participants in this research were educators from four schools, one school principal, one teacher librarian, two union representatives, two district coordinators, six classroom teachers, one learning support teacher, and one aboriginal language and culture teacher. The workshops, focus groups, and interviews were all held at an elementary school in Squamish B.C.

The first focus group consisted of a team of two (classroom teachers from a local elementary school) one of them a teacher librarian and one a district literacy coordinator: both were female. These individuals were both recruited via email correspondence.
The second focus group consisted of a team of teachers from another local elementary school, of the six individuals three were classroom teachers, one the school principal, one the learning support teacher, and one aboriginal culture and language teacher: five of these participants were female and one was male. These individuals were all recruited via email correspondence.

There were five individuals participating in interviews. All five were female, four classroom teachers, one itinerant staff, two union representatives, and two district coordinators. These individuals were all recruited via email correspondence.

**Validity**

Validity of this research was strengthened through the diverse representation of district staff involved and the two different types of qualitative data collection used. The voices of most attendees of the workshop series were heard, which was imperative to the research. With the diversity of participants, I was able to get a sense of what the educators in the buildings and offices throughout the district thought of the workshop series, and I have had many requests from within the district and beyond to host it since. Lastly, validity was strengthened by the fact that the workshop series was designed and both my interview and focus group questions were written after I was informed by the relevant literature. Several strategies, including triangulation and member checking, were also used in order to ensure that the validity of the findings in this study were maximized. Triangulation increased the validity of the findings of this study as I deliberately searched out evidence from a variety of sources. Both interviews and focus groups were done and the findings were compared and analyzed in conjunction with the researcher’s observations taken during the workshop series sessions. Member checking was also
conducted as the participants of both the focus groups and interviews were provided with copies of the transcripts from interviews and focus groups that they had participated in. In *Five Misunderstandings About Case Study Research* (2006) Bent Flyvbjerg discusses how a well-chosen case study can allow a student to achieve competence in a particular subject area, arguing that context-specific learning will only take him to a beginner level. It was my aim to take my learners past a beginner level of context specific learning and give them something that could be transferable to their own situations and that they could adapt in the future. By choosing a qualitative case study research method I was able to develop a more accurate bigger picture of what was going on for my learners and adapt my curriculum based on this knowledge. A qualitative case study research method increased the validity of the study as the participants were more free to make sense of their own learning than they would have been if the research structure had been more rigid and questioning times and techniques more uniform.

It was a difficulty for me to remain neutral throughout this research process as I have personal and professional relationships with the many of the participants. It is possible that some of the insights, made by participants, were comments they assumed I wanted to hear. This is a limitation of the study. An additional limitation in my study is my personal experiences with collaboration I have believed to have been effective and otherwise. I found it difficult throughout my study to remain unbiased in this respect.

**Analysis Techniques**

The qualitative data collected from the interview audio recordings was transcribed by me. It has been compiled, analyzed and sorted for themes. I began with eleven priori codes and added nine emergent codes. Some of these categories were expanded or
collapsed together as necessary. Once I had determined the most frequently occurring and most consistently reiterated themes, I re-examined the audio recordings from the interviews and the notes taken during the focus groups for stories and anecdotes supporting that theme. I have used these stories and anecdotes as evidence to support the emergent themes.
Chapter Four: Findings and Results

Introduction

My purpose in conducting this research study was to discover if spending time learning how to work together would benefit teachers in the long run. By facilitating the workshop series and then following up with the attendees it was my intention to see if any of the activities, strategies, profiles, or protocols we put in place together had helped them in any way. Particularly it was my desire to explore whether or not any of my participants had experienced a reduction in emotional stress or had discovered ways to be more efficient with their collaboration time as a result of the learning they had done. With the workshop series, I was attempting to convey the importance of collaborative teams taking a step back from merely getting work done in order to narrow the focus onto their own professional learning processes.

My research was done through a purely qualitative approach, and was completed in two separate parts. The first component of the research was a series of focus groups comprised of collaborative teams. The second component of the research was a series of individual interviews. Both components were made up of individuals who had attended the workshop series and had been working collaboratively since.

In the sections that follow, I have brought together the interview and focus group findings into the themes of……. I have used italics to highlight words that were provided by participants… (just explain a bit more what the reader is going to see. You could indicate here that you used pseudonyms which would avoid the necessity of the footnotes too)
Examples of Good Conflict

“Collaboration is messy and there will be conflict if you are doing it right.”

- Cedar\textsuperscript{1}: Interview Participant

Mining For Conflict

A common theme that emerged from the interview data was individuals’ experiences with good conflict after having attended the workshop series. After working with the conflict profiles and being exposed to the some of the literature on conflict in the workshop, it was common for participants to become more aware of good conflict as it surfaced in their daily interactions and collaborative experiences. Moira\textsuperscript{2} even recalled a past experience with new understanding claiming that she now realized that an uncomfortable situation was really an example of useful conflict. In this scenario, she and her group were attempting to put together a product and were struggling. She commented that it seemed that even though there were different teaching philosophies and potentially different values in terms of where they saw the end product going, the educators involved all had the same goal of creating the best learning environment for their students. At the time, she saw this experience as uncomfortable, because everyone was debating the direction of the product, but now she realized that the conflict she was experiencing, while uncomfortable, was useful. She wished she had realized this at the time so that she could have given some “real-time permission” (stopping the conversation to remind

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{1} Cedar is a pseudonym
\textsuperscript{2} Moira is a pseudonym
\end{footnotesize}
everyone that what they were doing was good and that disagreeing only meant that they were all engaged in the process). She commented that it was difficult and that “we had to change a scenario into something different and the whole table didn’t know how to do it. We were struggling with it, so maybe that’s where the learning was”.

Jessica\(^3\) also realized a time where she and her team were engaging in positive conflict, only she had this experience after engaging in the workshop series and was able to stop her team and give them real-time permission. When asked about her most positive collaboration experience Jessica spoke of a time when she and her team were planning a math unit. She expressed that when individuals were disagreeing with each other and challenging each other’s ideas and opinions, she realized that everyone there was wanting to do their best and was willing to work through it. She noticed this and began attempting the mining for conflict strategy, first by offering real-time permission and then by focusing on being curious about what her teammates were saying. She noticed that even though “some of us are strong personalities and some aren’t, we still didn’t allow any personalities to take over, and everyone was still true to themselves”.

Most of the interview participants expressed a newfound realization that being different and having disagreements was a good thing. One participant likened finding a good collaborative partner to finding a good life partner. “Yes, heterogeneous groups of teachers who are not ‘like-minded’ can cause good conflict which is beneficial for collaboration. But I think it’s more enjoyable to work with those who are different enough, but who also see eye to eye with you regarding the basic principles of teaching and learning. A good collaboration partner is sort of like finding a good personal life

\(^3\) Jessica is a pseudonym
partner. Your differences are often complementary, but your core values need to be somewhat similar”. And while all of the participants agreed that it was important to have different ideas to contribute to a collaborative situation, many of them expressed that being on the same values page was important. They expressed that sometimes it’s difficult to collaborate with someone who has a vastly different teaching philosophy and as one participant stated, sometimes “it comes down to a difference in philosophy, what’s important to your teaching”. Participants stated that although they sometimes were expected to collaborate with certain individuals on staff that they had a different teaching philosophy than, they were happy that educators are afforded a significant amount of autonomy and could for the most part choose who they wanted to work with. They also spoke often about how much easier it was to understand these coworkers with whom they had difficulty seeing eye-to eye, since the workshop series. “I had a much easier time looking at their point of view from a place of curiosity, rather than judgement” Moira stated when talking about one such interaction. Moira who is a self-proclaimed “people pleaser” even expressed excitement over an idea she had for a “meeting of the minds or a place to come together and hear about what people are learning and have discussions and debates about it, we need more of that.”

Conflict Profiling

*I Liked the conflict profile, and I know our school has already done a protocol, but I think that doing this was an important step in developing our team.*

Jessica: Interview Participant

The importance of implementing conflict profiling in all future teams was a pervasive thought. All participants found this aspect of the workshop to be incredibly
useful and expressed feelings of relief in how adding it to their team dynamics had changed their teaching practice. One team had implemented a basic “getting to know each other” protocol at the beginning of the school year, and realized that their conflict section in this protocol “was far too basic and surfacy”. They realized that asking individuals questions like “how would you like to receive feedback” would not elicit authentic responses, as individuals tend to respond in a way that they “think people want to hear” rather than in a way that truly aligns with their preferences. This team thought that having a conflict profile separate from their regular protocol was important and something that they would implement from now on. They felt that even just discussing how they would like to deal with conflict helped them feel a greater sense of empathy and understanding for both their own and each other’s actions.

**Examples of Toxic Conflict**

After having attended the workshop series interview participants were both able to accurately identify moments of unhealthy conflict in collaborative experiences as well as effectively pinpoint what it was about those moments that made them unhealthy. Three main themes, in terms of examples of unhealthy conflict, arose from the interviews and those themes are: politics and gossip, lack of a common understanding, and conflict avoidance.

Politics and Gossip

*When we face, disagreements fueled by anger and hurt, and we get involved in*
conversations where people are emotionally charged...it is dangerous. It’s opening ourselves up, setting us up for disappointment, resentment, blame, and more hurt, more shame. When we are in those arguments we say things, we don’t mean and/or we say it in the wrong way. Really, we all just want to be heard, we want others to hold space for us, to stop talking in circles so that we can think. We want to share without a defensive remark coming back at us.

Cedar: Interview Participant

All of the interview participants could recall moments of politics and gossip that they could identify as what they previously would have called conflict. After the workshop series, they all expressed a new understanding of the difference between conflict, which can fuel a collaborative team, and politics, which is toxic to a team environment. Many of the teams, after having attended the workshop series, had identified success with some new strategies for culling these unhealthy thoughts and feelings from their team. Quite a few interview participants were inspired to go out and read Daring Greatly (Brene Brown, 2010) in order to develop a better understanding of the concepts of shame, vulnerability, and trust. One participant shared her learning on the subject stating that “allowing each person to talk, listen, and feel empathy is key, but the truth is that most of us are terrible at this. We are reactive, acting on our emotions instantly before taking a moment to process them before we share. My husband often gets frustrated because he is an internalizer, a thinker, and before he gets to finish what he is sharing, he is often, regularly, and consistently cutoff. When this happens, he does not feel heard, and does not feel like talking anymore.” This participant realized that what her husband was experiencing was a similar reaction to what her teammates sometimes
encounter at work and feelings of shame and pride can colour how we interact with our teammates. One participant remarked that “oftentimes we are afraid of looking mean or stupid, so we resort to gossip and fixate on political issues rather than being proactive with and open about our inner dialogue”.

One team, who had been silently avoiding some personal conflict finally realized how much built up anger and resentment they had towards one another during the final workshop session. In working as a group to complete a success criteria, one member finally unleashed the truth that she had been feeling excluded from collaboration opportunities for most of the year. This resulted in her storming out of the workshop, leaving the rest of her team to process what had just happened. When later asked about this experience participants agreed that this explosion, while uncomfortable at the time, finally helped them to move forward as a team. The one team member expressed a growing resentment and jealousy throughout the year, and the rest of the team divulged that they had been living with the feeling that something was amiss but despite best efforts could never pin down exactly what was the matter. The group collectively asserted that it was the experience of “ending the he-said, she-said style of gossip and finally discussing their feelings that allowed them to move towards a place of mutual understanding”. The data suggests that the issue this team was having during this period of turmoil was a perceived lack of dedication from the one member, “commitment can be an issue if all members are not reliable or available physically or emotionally. It becomes an issue if some are not perceived as being able to contribute due to stressors in their lives”. The team expressed seeing the member as being “flaky, not showing up when she said she would, acting disengaged, or continuously telling stories rather than getting
It wasn’t until the member was able to express her vulnerability by disclosing that she was so overwhelmed by the difficulty of her job that the rest of the group explained being able to finally grasp an understanding of where she was coming from. The member stated that “it felt like before she could get down to work, she needed someone to vent to”. Participating in the workshop series allowed collaborative teams to both come to a shared meaning of the term collaboration, as well as to realize the importance of resolving personal conflict issues. Workshop participants expressed relief and an increased efficacy in their abilities to work together after opening themselves up to the vulnerability required to face these issues head on.

Lack of Clarity

*I have had twilight zone collaboration moments for sure, you have those moments when you are co-planning something and then you go and actually execute it and it’s like... way different. The person goes off in a completely different tangent than what we talked about.*

*Moira, Interview Participant*

The lack of clarity, or mutual understanding was also a common theme among interview participants. Many expressed having been in collaboration meetings, where they had all assumed they were on the same page, only to have teammates go in an entirely different direction than had been discussed. One participant spoke of her experiences and “those times when you are like ‘were we at the same meeting when we co-planned this’ because this is not what we talked about at all”. Another participant
expressed the need to sometimes say “I need time to process” in order to be clear about what we talked about. “Sometimes you are all sitting in the same room, but we hear and remember things differently”. There are always times when we sit in on the same meetings with our colleagues and leave having heard a different message. Workshop participants realized the importance of re-stating key points as well as clarifying key terms as a way to ensure a shared understanding.

Avoiding

Sometimes there is someone who dominates and maybe they aren’t even self aware of that yet. By avoiding conflict, we are only allowing ourselves to be treated in a way that we don’t appreciate.

Jessica: Interview Participant

Many of the participant spoke of their new understanding of the different styles of dealing with conflict and identified that even though they didn’t think it at the time of the workshop, they had noticed that they (and others they observed) had the tendency to avoid conflict more than they had previously thought. One participant spoke of an experience that stuck in her memory as she felt she wasn’t being heard, yet never spoke up about it. At the time, she didn’t realize that she was avoiding the conflict, but later when she reflected on the experience she identified that maybe that was a reason the interaction had bothered her so much. Jessica spoke of a time when she and a colleague decided to co-teach a P.E lesson. While the two classes were engaged in the activity Jessica noticed that the supply room was a huge mess, and decided to begin sorting it. While she was out of the room Jessica missed an altercation, and returned to hear that the other teacher “was lecturing the class saying that she had had enough of this and that
there would be no more gym on rainy days, then she began shuffling everyone out of the gym and back to class”. Jessica wasn’t sure what had happened, but felt unhappy about being left out of the decision to return to class. She recalled not saying anything because of a feeling of guilt about not being in the gym to witness the incident. “When we got back to class I asked her if she wanted me to cover the class so that she could take a break and she was like ‘why would I take a break? I am not mad, I am just sick and tired of this behaviour and I am not going to tolerate it anymore’ and I was like ok, but then she told both classes that they were going to be working on projects for the rest of the day”. What really bothered Jessica and allowed her to realize that things had gone too far was that after this statement the other teacher shut the door between the two classes, leaving Jessica alone with hers. It was at this moment that she realized she didn’t want her students working on projects because they had just worked hard to clean up. “I was like ok, no one ever asked me what I wanted out of this, no one ever asked me before we got upset with the students, no one ever asked me if we could make adjustments to the gym, so I was like... here we are teaching gym together, but I was not included in any part of the process”. When Jessica reflected on that she thought about the fact that she herself was possibly not being the best teammate in this situation as she tried to look at the situation from the other teacher’s perspective. She wondered if “maybe it bothered her that I left her in the gym alone while I was cleaning up the supply room, that probably would have bothered me”. After this experience, Jessica noticed that she had been avoiding conflict by not voicing her opinion, but she also considered the fact that maybe this was a good time to avoid conflict as the students were present and arguing in front of them wasn’t something she was willing to do. She considered how much better
things between herself and the other teacher would be in the future if she had taken the
time to approach her about the incident later.

When asked to identify their individual conflict styles, most workshop attendees
self-identified as either preferring to collaborate or compromise, but later during the
interviews participants realized that they preferred avoiding conflict much more than they
had previously thought. Participants expressed being more self-aware of their conflict
avoidance as it was happening, realizing that this awareness afforded them an opportunity
to reflect. By stopping and being critical of the way they were addressing conflict as it
arose, participants were more able to stop and consider how they planned to deal with it
later. Avoidance has a time and place in terms of conflict, but it is never the end. If we
are to maintain a healthy team environment, when conflict is avoided we must always
think of how we plan to address the issue later.

**Lack of Time**

In the interview data, I was expecting to see certain themes emerge and lack of
time to collaborate was one of them. I was surprised at how few individuals mentioned
this as a stumbling block, choosing to focus on bigger issues of team building such as the
intricacies of conflict. There were a few participants who expressed an initial fear of the
time commitment of the workshop series itself, which leads me to believe that this may
be why I didn’t have more collaborative teams participating. There was also a sentiment
of not being sure of other team members’ willingness to commit to collaborative times
outside of release time. A few participants worried that some of their teammates might be
attending in a way that was stretching themselves too thin and expressed wanting to allow
for individuals to say no when asked to collaborate during free time.
Focus Group Results

Proactively Improving Team Effectiveness

In both focus groups, there was a genuine excitement for implementing the learning from the workshop series. One member likened it to “wet dog syndrome” she explained that her team had gone back to their school and had been so excited that they shook their learning all over their colleagues like a wet dog. Some of the key aspects of their learning that groups were excited to introduce were implementing protocols, revisiting protocols, professional learning plans, conflict profiles, and having more of their staff attend the workshop series in the future. One team member talked about how she would have a new teaching partner next year and was interested in meeting with her before September to discuss their boundaries, conflict styles, and personality preferences. As she was anticipating moving schools, she expressed the importance of attempting to reach out to her main collaborators and make an attempt to get to know them better before jumping into getting work done. Both teams expressed the importance of using some of the techniques learned in the workshop series to “start off well in the coming school year”. A team member whose principal attended the workshop series hoped that he would bring this forth to her school as a community. “I would like to bring up how to start out the year more effectively and what the reasons why are. I appreciated how this workshop design was directly supported by the literature. I think that people could get behind that”.

Three attendees of the workshop series were a part of our district Instructional Leadership Team (or ILT). Focus group participants on the ILT expressed how transformative engaging in the process of team building and understanding the meaning
of collaboration would be for their team. They expressed a hope that this workshop could
be given at the beginning of the year for the ILT. A focus group participant who is a
school principal expressed that even though his staff was better at working as a team than
most, the workshop series allowed him to realize how much room for growth there still
was. He equated what we learned to how we build community in our classrooms. We
don’t just say something once at the beginning of the year and expect it to continue
without revisiting it frequently. He suggested that although the protocol was a great thing
that his staff was already doing, he realized the need to revisit and edit it periodically
throughout the school year.

One participant, who was anticipating moving into a new position with a new
teaching partner was excited about the idea to sit down one-on-one with that person and
discuss conflict styles and boundaries before beginning a partnership. She even suggested
writing an ‘All About Me’ letter to each other, so that each of them could explain their
strengths and challenges. She also thought that “doing the personality test and sending it
to the other person so they can see your preferences and where they are right now”
would be useful.

Both focus group teams realized their need for a professional learning plan.
Engaging with the workshop series allowed them to realize that their practice was
dependent upon their ability to focus on their own learning journey in the same way they
expected their students to focus on theirs. One member suggested that by developing a
professional learning plan, new team members could find an entry point to buy-in to the
school culture and feel a part of it.
Lack of Time

In the individual interviews, there was little mention of lack of time to engage in effective collaboration techniques, but in the focus groups there was quite a bit of talk about how lack of time affected their abilities to be effective. The fact that the focus groups were held at the end of the school year resulted in many of the participants expressing feelings of burn-out and exhaustion. One teacher stated that even though “we are all working together, at the end of the year we drop so many balls which damages our relationships”. Some of the focus group members even admitted to not trying to “collaborate properly anymore due to the fact that we are at the point of waiting and putting off discussions until September. Right now, it’s time to get things done”. One focus group team recalled a recent collaboration they had where one of their members seemed so clearly frazzled that she didn’t want to participate in the fun team building activity at the end. They addressed the fact that maybe this individual really did want to join, but needed some emotional support to get her going, lamenting that “it was disappointing that she missed out, but there isn’t always time to stop and meet everyone’s needs”. She compared this train of thought with how we are in our classrooms. “We do this with the students in our classes as well. Sometimes the way they are acting is affecting the rest of the class and we have to act in a way that we know is going to damage our relationship with that student, but in the best interest of the rest of the class we need to keep moving forward”.

One participant expressed that sometimes “it’s hard: to find the time, starting a meeting on time, focusing, keeping focused, sharing ideas, being receptive to others, being able to communicate effectively, and being objective, it all takes time”. This same
participant also expressed how she has difficulty not over extending. This sentiment was echoed around the table and many other participants made comments that they just wanted to be involved in everything because they care so much and they love their job, but sometimes this gets them into trouble and they end up “dropping balls”. One participant stated that he recognized that because of his team’s collective tendency to overextend and because of the limited time they had that things get started, “but then we can’t always follow through and reflect on our process: which is the most important part”.

One focus group identified an issue of collaboration being that the individuals “having trouble would not be the ones attending the 6pm workshop” but suggested that maybe they would take release time to work on their skills as collaborators. This same team also debated the issue of high school teachers and their reluctance to leave their classrooms for the day. “They don’t seem to want to be away from their students or want anyone else in”. In the workshop series, I did not have any representatives from either the high schools or the middle schools in town, despite their being invited, so I could not gather any firsthand information on this subject. Even though all focus group participants identified the workshop series and the skills they had gained from them as incredibly valuable, as a whole they doubted that outsiders would realize the amount of time using these skills and participating in the workshop series could save them in the future.

“Aha” Moments

Collaboration is a learned skill, we have identified it as such as it’s something that we are trying to teach to our kids, so obviously, we should be learning it
Focus Group Participant, Unicorn Lake Collaborative Team Focus Group

Educators often define moments of clarity as “aha” moments, many focus group participants expressed “aha” moments they had experienced both during and following the workshop series. One focus group participant recalled a recent collaborative experience stating that there were “brilliant people sitting in the room, but nothing got done, we think we should be able to collaborate, but I finally realized that we don’t actually know how”. The participant expressed that some people think that team building is going to be too “touchy feely” but reflected that the process was actually a lot more black and white than it looked. She couldn’t believe that her team had never taken the time to discuss their conflict preferences before and declared that just the act of talking about it lead to an overwhelming feeling of calm and being understood “it seems so silly we haven’t done this before, it took no time at all and saved us an incredible amount of emotional energy and unproductive time”. A participant described the experience of having newly realized boundaries by wondering aloud “why grumble about getting so many emails on weekends instead of just telling people that it’s not ok?”

During one of the workshop sessions a participant opened up to her colleague when she stated, “every time you drink that coffee stuff, you bang the spoon on the side of the glass and then make a slurping sound when you push the spoon to one side to sip it. It drives me nuts”. This admonition resulted in peals of laughter throughout the room, especially from the coffee slurper herself. “Gosh, if I had realized how much it bothered you, I would have stopped a long time ago, maybe I can get myself a plastic spoon and

---

4 Unicorn Lake is a pseudonym
then it won’t make that sound when I stir the powder in”. In a subsequent focus group a participant from another team pinpointed this as a moment of clarity for her. She wondered how long these two had been working together, and were friends, without being able to admit something so silly to one another. She also predicted how much easier things would be for them in the future, both knowing this about one another as well as having a newfound realization that bringing these sorts of issues up wasn’t as difficult as they thought it might be. “I have been reflecting on that moment a lot and sharing it with a lot of new teachers who are taking teacher share positions. My advice to these teachers has recently become to discuss boundaries and idiosyncrasies beforehand, both so that you understand one another better, and so that you make space for these types of conversations early on”.

Another team, during a focus group were so excited to share their “aha” moment that they spoke about it first at an inquiry sharing dinner. They spoke about how they had decided to take a math course together and that in an attempt to further their learning journey they decided that they needed to co-teach as well as co-plan, and co-assess. “This was a transformational moment. We made a conscious effort that we were going to co-teach three math sessions a week and that we were going to take one afternoon a week to co-assess and co-plan after school”. At the inquiry dinner, they shared that they would never again teach in isolation, and that co-planning, co-teaching, and co-assessing was where education was headed.

The Importance of Trust

“I love this team because I can trust that everyone has what’s needed to be done
Vulnerability: being comfortable being open about failures, weaknesses, and fears

The importance of trust on a team was a topic that both focus groups thought was important. They expressed the need to have safe places, where everyone can be free to be themselves. Both groups identified how difficult it is to hide who you are from the people you spend so much time with, and spoke about how much easier their work lives are when you trust each other and allow yourself to be known. One of the focus group participants defined collaboration as being “built on trust and having a common goal”. He shared that the workshop series had inspired him to look more deeply into the subject of trust and he shared his learning: “Now that I am reading the speed of trust, I can see that everything that is a conflict or a success is always rooted in trust. People are acting with their character and integrity. I am feeling like an important part of building a collaborative culture is talking about trust. What do we do to build trust? On a professional learning plan committee, you are working on your learning, but you are also working on collaborative skills. What are the traits of a good collaborator and how do we get better at it?” The participant expressed his desire to dig deeper into the ideas on how to build trust and collaborate together using more structures and protocols. He spoke about how this could help his team to get more things done and move to action more quickly. He also expressed excitement about his newfound realization that collaboration

Focus Group Participant, Rainbow Ridge Collaborative Team Focus Group

Rainbow Ridge is a pseudonym
is something you can get better at. The participant felt that a reflective practice could be built in to help his team more easily recognize patterns of behaviour and identify areas of growth. He also thought that reminding each other about the protocol would potentially stop feelings of resentment from growing as it would serve to remind them of our understandings of each other.

Safety: Feeling safe to be vulnerable

Incorporating proactive strategies for conflict resolution like this it is possible to reduce the amount of time required for reactive strategies. One of the focus group members spoke of the circle process and how it made her feel safe when there was a moderator she trusted. She spoke of several times when she had personally participated in restorative circles and expressed the different feelings she had about those circles based on this idea of trust. “It was nice when I had a facilitator that I trusted. The only reason I was ok going into a conflict situation like this was because I trusted the team to be respectful and I trusted the circle keeper to keep it a safe place”.

Fear of Push-Back, or Lack of Buy-In

It was common during the focus groups for teams to begin discussing how much value they put into this process and turn to discussions of strategy for getting fellow educators interested. They feared that “not everyone initially puts value in this process. I want to get this idea and these practices on the table, but what if someone thinks that it is too touchy feely and won’t buy-in? I don’t think that person is going to want to sit down and talk about their values with me”. Another group recalled talking after the focus
group meeting about how they might get the rest of their staff on board and expressed a wish that more people had attended in their collaborative teams.

**Emotional Relief**

Many focus group participants expressed a feeling of emotional relief once they let themselves be known. One team realized that a member who was feeling left out of collaboration actually was in need of more personal connection. Once she was able to let herself and her needs be known, both she and her team admitted to feeling a sense of emotional relief. They felt as though the air had been cleared and there was no longer this unknown standing in the way of their efficacy and sabotaging the feeling of community. By learning more about collaboration, this participant realized that she had been miscommunicating what she had been craving. What the team described the participant of vocalizing, was a lack of inclusion in collaboration opportunities. When the participant explained being able to see how the team was interpreting her vocalizations she expressed gaining clarity by realizing that she was “seeing these collaborative opportunities as time for the others to connect with each other”. The rest of the group explained that because they misunderstood her need they had attempted several times to involve her in collaboration and project planning only to have her seem disinterested. When she was finally able to express that in order for her to collaborate she had a need to first connect to her teammates, the rest of the team was able to slow down and allow her the time to be social before getting down to business.

Another story a team recalled about feeling known which led to a sense of emotional relief was when one member divulged to her colleagues that she had a hatred
for certain sounds. She stated that what she experienced was more than just annoyance but a severe emotional reaction and in some cases pain. This participant claimed to always feel crazy when she asked a person to stop making a sound, and generally either left the room, or tried to bury the feeling if someone was making sounds that bothered her. After having shared this with her team she recalled a moment in the staffroom a few weeks later when a non-team member was scraping their bowl loudly with their spoon. She winced quietly and tried to endure the pain when her colleague spoke up and said “what you are doing right now is making Thea\textsuperscript{6} crazy, would you mind stopping?” The participant said she felt so relieved that someone understood her and stated that “it made her feel less crazy”.

The feeling of emotional relief was one echoed again and again when discussing experiences that occurred after the workshop series. Many participants felt that opening up and becoming more known had been something they had feared and had previously not even considered, but reflected that creating space for the conversation was enough to make them willing to share.

Themes appearing in Both Focus Groups and Interview Data

**Increased Awareness and Understanding of the Skill of Collaboration**

*I think it’s important to have a conversation with the people you are going to collaborate with, about what collaboration really is. How do we (as a collaborative team) define collaboration? Is it chatting with a colleague about*

\textsuperscript{6} Thea is a pseudonym
Both the interview and the focus group data indicated that attendees of the workshop series felt an improved understanding of what it means to collaborate and how to engage more effectively as a team because of this newfound understanding. Participants expressed a renewed awareness that although educators are currently focusing on the competency of collaboration with their students, that they may also need to cultivate this competency amongst themselves. All participants also expressed frustration about being expected to collaborate without first being taught how. Many participants also communicated the idea that so many educators don’t realize how important it is to be self-aware of themselves as well as with each other when engaging with the collaboration process echoing sentiments similar to that expressed by Cedar when she articulated, “we only think about what we are producing and not about the process which we are engaging with”. One participant spoke about how she now realizes how sensitive she is to other people’s moods and reactions and wondered if more of her colleagues knew her better, or if she knew them better she could better navigate her relationships with them. “We are all human so things are going to happen, but the awareness thing is so important. In the groups and the people, you work the closest with is so important to know what you are doing as you are doing it”. And while many participants expressed that their initial thoughts about the workshop would that they would gain some insight on how to collaborate more effectively, they all expressed that attending the workshops did more than that. “After attending the workshops, we can be
more aware because we know the steps to make things easier” and “I learned about the importance of thinking about exactly what collaboration is and defining it”.

It was common for participants to express that what they had been doing before was not collaboration, and maybe who they were working with wasn’t even really a part of their team. Quite a few participants told stories about times they had previously thought they were collaborating, but now realized that they weren’t. “There was no collaboration, the collaborative experience lacked the collaborative piece. And it was dictated to me what my students should be doing and then once the doors were closed I re-claimed my power with the class and told them what we were actually going to do”.

When asked about their new definition of collaboration since the workshop series, participants said things like “being flexible” and “having good conflict”. Most participants were also more able to identify moments when they should and shouldn’t be collaborating. “Your team should be collaborating when you are working as a group of people where everyone has a voice, and everyone has a role or something to contribute or share. If there is stuff to do for the next meeting, everyone needs to take on a role that fits their strength, passion or interest” and “planning events isn’t considered collaboration it’s just planning”. Even though there was a common understanding of the need to re-define collaboration, many participants still wondered about what may or may not fit into their new definition. “Being flexible when collaborating is important, but disorganization and straying off topic can also make us feel resentful and frustrated. I am thinking that it’s best to stay present and be aware of how others in our group are feeling. That will hopefully make it easier to make judgements on when to keep others on track or allow the fluid nature of conversation to take over”. Participants also wondered
how much they should give in to focusing on the process, given that it is still important to end with a product, reflecting that many educators have this same wonder and inner conflict when it comes to our students’ output. It is important for assessments to be formative in nature, but most educators realize the importance of developing their students’ abilities to produce a summative product. When asked a question about the importance of actually getting the work done, or producing a product as well as focusing on the process, Jessica wondered “when sharing stories about students, teaching methods, or worries about collaboration stop being productive and get in the way of getting the work done?” Jessica also reflected how she noticed that the most important thing is that there is a discussion around the topic of product versus process and expressed realizing that nothing can work exactly the same for every team voicing that “as long as the staff within a school have a shared understanding of what is meant by the term collaboration I think they will be off to a good start.”

Overall the participants expressed their acceptance of the fact that their learning wouldn’t end when the workshop series did and that in order to be successful they would have to keep learning more about how their team collaborates on their own. “You don’t know what you don’t know, I love working with people all the time and I feel like it’s not anything you can be an expert at ever, it’s a constant skill that needs to be developed and it’s so variable and dependent on who you are working with.”

Perception of Increased Efficacy
COLLABORATION IN EDUCATION

Part of the idea behind the workshop series was to help teachers to be more efficient with their collaborative time. Since we, as a profession, are given very little time to work together it felt important to find ways to make the most of what little time we have. I was happy to hear that many of the attendees of the workshop had felt that their efficacy and use of their collaborative time had improved significantly since the workshop series. Many of the participants expressed not really realizing that the interactions in the past had indeed been less effective than they could have been, if they had first taken the time to build their team. Many of the participants also voiced their desire for the rest of their teams to attend the workshop series as they could see these other members unknowingly taking the team off track in one way or another. All teams expressed that their increased efficacy included a new understanding of one another’s boundaries and a more concrete definition of the term collaboration.

Teams relayed stories of how the boundaries they had set in order to improve both efficacy and achieve a better work-life balance. These boundaries most commonly included themes of “keeping the meetings to an hour or less”, “staying focused and on task”, and “starting on time”. When asked why individuals were set on having collaboration meetings kept to an hour or less, they explained that this hour was important because it felt more effective and like they were getting more done. “In the co-assessing meetings we had, we always met on Monday’s after school, and we were always done by five, but by the time we met it wasn’t until like 3:45 ish, so we only had an hour before we had to wrap up and go and it just seemed like we were super-efficient because of that time limit”. They reiterated that “we know that this was all the time we
had so we just, bang, bang, bang, got things done. I think the time limit was helpful in terms of our productivity and efficiency. You avoid the chit-chat and get to business”.

Other themes of increased efficiency included choosing a neutral place, creating a shape of the day, and a developing a common understanding of how individuals wanted to be interrupted. It was established that often things get off track and that team members were reluctant to point this out until they came up with a system for bringing the conversation back to topic at hand. As one participant pointed out “we noticed that there is a difference between straying off topic into conversation that is not purposeful, versus moving the topic in another direction that is much needed”.

Participants also identified themselves as being better able to indicate what made a collaboration meeting more successful than they had been able to before. “The most productive collaboration session I had was when we had an agenda, we had it all planned out, we knew what time we were meeting and ending, we chose a neutral place that was off school property, and it was just a really nice way to work together”.

Participants also felt more capable of standing up for what they felt they needed in a collaboration session. “I also understood this concept from my own personal experiences. When I was having meetings every Wednesday morning we would always do a check-in and we would put some sort of an agenda together. We would write down the topics we wanted to talk about and figure out what we should start with. If you take some simple steps to actually get to know your colleagues and what their values and limitations as well as analyzing what makes good collaboration good, instead of just jumping in, that’s where you start building efficiency”.
Increased Understanding of Teammates

Personality Types

*My understanding and being more aware, helped me to see the contributions that one of my trickier to work with colleagues was making. They may not be the same contributions that we put out, but there are actually awesome contributions that she makes and just being aware of that more since I took the workshops. There are all sorts of awesome things that she is doing and they aren’t the same things that we are doing, but I have begun to notice her filling in our deficits.*

*Moira: Interview Participant*

Learning how to get to know other personality types and meet the needs of other members of their teams was a common experience for workshop attendees. Many experienced an increased sense of empathy for their teammates as well as a better understanding of why they acted the way that they did. “*When we work as a team we all have our own little place*”. Many of the attendees expressed the realization that by knowing their teammates better they had an easier time seeing what they were doing from the person’s point of view, rather than making up a story in their own heads to explain the behaviour. “*I feel like all of my colleagues have their little quirks so I feel like I am in good company. I am accepting of theirs, so now I don’t really worry about them accepting mine. I laughed at the PD day because we were five minutes into it, sitting around the table getting ready to be collaborative and then a teammate pulled out her aromatherapy and then another pulled hers out too. I was laughing so hard, because I knew that that is what the two of them needed*”. One group spoke of how the conflict
profile helped them to learn how to meet each other’s needs and navigate different personality types, but still had some questions they intended on considering for the future. Cedar said “it is challenging working with different people with a variety of personality types. Some people like to work fast, getting through lots of material, not straying off topic. Others like to talk through things and allow the conversation to flow naturally, moving from one topic to another. How do we navigate collaboration meetings so that we can all leave feeling satisfied? Is that even possible? Maybe there needs to be some give and take”. They expressed how this learning and these questions helped them to navigate relationships both with each other and with other team members who hadn’t attended the workshop series. One participant recalled forgetting to include her teammate on an email, and because of spending time getting to know her in the workshop series, she realized how sensitive she was and how much being overlooked would hurt her. Because of this knowledge and the common language, they had developed in their time getting to know each other, she was able to apologize in a way that her teammate could tell was authentic. “It’s nice to get to know what matters to other people on your team” one participant stated “because then you can make sure those things are included in the day to day”.

Strengths and Gaps

Our third session when we were trying to collaborate on a protocol and it brought out a lot, it is interesting because what stood out to me was that someone could be thinking something but not communicating it and how it is so important to have the opportunities to share what you are thinking otherwise everyone is perceiving
By identifying their strengths and gaps participants identified feeling less responsible for their shortcomings and more proud of the value they brought to the team. One participant recalled her teammate stating that she didn’t really like to speak in meetings, so the next time that individual chose to share at a meeting the participant was much more careful to listen and respond to try and keep the conversation going. She wanted to make sure that her teammate had the opportunity to be heard when she felt comfortable doing so and was only able to do that because her teammate share her preferences. The participant recalled having “a meeting after that conversation, and she started sharing, I noticed. I made myself present and I purposely responded to the things she was saying in an attempt to keep the conversation going so that she would feel successful in her sharing and would want to do that again”. Another participant recalled preparing for a meeting with a teammate after learning about her personality preferences and limitations in one of the workshop meetings “when I went to collaborate with her I knew that I had to put a plan together, I think it was me finally knowing my colleague and knowing what to expect from them, so I was putting a structure in place, so that our meeting could be successful”. It was common for participants to express the fact that they “loved how everyone has their own strengths and the better we get to know one another the more we can rely on each other’s strengths” remarking often how much stronger this made them as a team.
Attendees of the workshop discovered that by expressing their own boundaries they were allowing the rest of the group to know them, and instead of sounding silly for wanting things a certain way, they noticed that their teammates wanted to respect their boundaries, but it was hard when they were having to guess what those boundaries were. One participant recalled that because of another teammate’s need for connection their team decided to have a day where they just hung out after school and did something creative. The participant recalled feeling like her work day was just extended and that she didn’t feel relaxed at all. She wondered about the fact that her needs were not being met in order to meet the needs of her teammate and expressed that sometimes she needed to be away from her teammates even though she felt close to them as a way to feel as though her work day was over. “Many of us have boundaries related to family as well. If there is an important family gathering, or if family is sick and needs our help we might need to be there. We need to acknowledge that evenings and weekends are often ‘family time’ for many of us, and this is why work related interruptions are avoided. Our team is learning to support each other in balancing work and personal life”. This same participant also wondered about how to meet the needs of others for connection, while maintaining boundaries. She expressed that some individuals need to talk about everything, while others don’t want to talk. “Could it be possible that when two people’s needs are in direct contradiction with each other that there is no right answer?” This same sentiment came up again later in another focus group when a participant wondered about someone who “was taking things too personally” and if it was possible to continue being honest and open with this individual.
Increased Understanding of Self

Personality Types

*It was also knowing everyone a little bit more from the personality test. Knowing myself a bit more. When I went with one of my teams to collaborate before we went I was like I need to know what my purpose is and what I can do to help. And a teammate said what I want you to do is ‘write the notes and can you put everything we talk about into the school calendar’. The whole time I was there I didn’t feel like it was a waste of my time, I had something to do and that’s something I learned about myself from the personality profile as well. I need to know what my purpose is.*

*Jessica: Interview Participant*

In general participants expressed how helpful it was in their collaborative processes to know themselves better and to have a common language around which they could feel comfortable having their gaps pointed out. All of the participants spoke passionately about how the personality profile helped them to identify their own strengths and weaknesses. They said things like “I am too sensitive, but I am working on it” or “I am a good leader and now I have worked harder to take that role more seriously”. They enjoyed the process of learning more about themselves and learning about how others viewed their contributions. Most attendees expressed genuine surprise when the majority of their team agreed on their strengths, often declaring that they never really saw themselves that way and that they were grateful that others did. Participants shared that being identified for their strengths by their teammates allowed them to focus more on what they knew they were doing right rather than continuing to guess. They also pointed
out that they could see how sometimes their biggest weakness could be turned into a strength by merely identifying it and working on it. Cedar revealed feeling that “personally, when I’m collaborating with a team I like to stay on topic and keep our goals in mind. I prefer not to get too much into storytelling, and to focus more on future actions and planning. I recognize that there are times when we need to slow down and share stories, or talk about other topics that become a greater priority. Organization does not come naturally to me so it is largely a skill I’ve had to learn. I’m also learning how to compromise and give space to those who need the conversation and collaboration to flow in a different way”. Participants remarked that “the personalities thing was super useful, I liked being able to reflect on my own style” and often said things like “I learned more about myself as a person or I realized I need to reflect more, so that I don’t just blurt everything out”.

Strengths and Gaps

Realizing things about themselves was a source of clarity for many participants. Often, they didn’t know that something they did was a strength, and oftentimes they didn’t truly know what they preferred or how they worked best until it was on a paper in front of them. “I discovered that I like it when we find out in advance if it’s going to be a lot of topics. How many minutes do you think something should take? If we go too long talking about something we can be proactive in looking for solutions and strategies rather than just a complaining session”. One participant had spent the majority of the year feeling left out of collaboration times not knowing why until she learned more about herself through the workshop series. “If I have enough time to connect with people and have quality time together then we can actually get stuff done when we are together. If
you have spent time connecting with your group, then it’s easier for me to get down to business. I just thought everyone was like that”. One participant spoke about getting to know herself better and accommodating for her own needs. “I know that I will talk over people, whether it’s because I am rude or because I am so afraid to forget my inner monologue is saying ‘oh, if I let this person talk I will lose my thought, so I will just power through’ I could see in my way that that’s my flaw, I speak over people”. Although the participant had always recognized this as something she disliked about herself, she never stopped to consider that maybe it was something that she could try and fix. After the workshop series, she decided to start carrying a notepad into meetings so that if she had a thought she could quickly write down a key word. That way she was able to remain present and listen to her teammates, while still not forgetting what it was she wanted to say.

In speaking about learning about herself the participant stated that “the hardest part is not letting your ego get in the way and getting defensive”. She wanted to know more, and realized that she had to stop being guarded in order to do so and in doing this Jessica learned, her self-proclaimed, most important thing about herself: that she needed a purpose. “I need to have something to do and that’s something I learned about myself from the personality profile: I need to know what my purpose is, so now I can always make sure that I have one”.

Boundaries

Just like knowing the boundaries of the members of your team it is equally important to get to know your own boundaries. Many participants initially stated that they didn’t have any boundaries. It was only because of the personal relationships many of
these individuals had with each other that they could be reminded of some of the things that consistently drive them crazy. It was only then that many of the attendees allowed themselves to express their boundaries, even to themselves. “Setting parameters are something I definitely want to do. I have noticed what my boundaries are. I realized that I don’t like to check my emails on the weekend, so I don’t do it anymore. Hey I don’t check my email, so text me if you need something.”

Examples of Conflict Resolution

In free-flowing arguments, there is no control. Rather, we are all fighting for it...we’re a bunch of alpha teachers fighting for space, fighting to be heard. This can be toxic. We’ve everything been there. It feels like, a mess, a show, a cat fight, and it leaves us feeling shameful, blamed, not heard, with issues unresolved.

Focus Group Participant, Rainbow Ridge Collaborative Team Focus Group

The participants from Rainbow Ridge Elementary school learned that there was some unresolved tension during the last day of the workshop series. At the end of the session as the team was trying to make a learning plan, one of the members blurted out all of the things that had been bothering her and her outburst was not met with compassion. Shortly after this incident, and others like it, the group realized that they had to stop and solve this problem before moving any further. The group, working at an Aboriginal language and culture school, decided to put into practice what they had been telling their students to do all year. “We needed to be models of how to resolve conflict by not erupting and speaking to each other when we are not in a good head space. We needed to understand that we were feeling strong emotions, and that a circle was necessary so that more hurtful things were not said”. Having a language and culture teacher as part of their
teaching team meant that the group was able to drop what they were doing, sit down, and work through their unhealthy conflict in this way. They explained that in circle, where the facilitator says a few words and then passes the talking piece around for each individual to contribute going around the circle until the issue feels resolved, you have the support of everyone involved because just being there means you want to find a resolution. Lead in “Instead, in a circle we get turns to talk without getting defensive, without arguing back and forth. We truly listen to one another and feel heard. I believe in the power of circle. That when we are dealing with conflict that is driving a wedge in our relationships, that we need to bring the issue to circle and trust the process, work through it in a safe place”. In their experience circle was reactive, but they explained how it could be proactive if it was worked into the culture of a team saying things like “we should bring this conversation to circle and set up a time to meet” explaining that the more this becomes routine practice, the better collaborative teams will get at it. They spoke repeatedly about how being a circle takes away the panic and the feeling of violation you get when you can’t finish sharing what you are thinking. One participant reflected on the feeling of control she got from the circle. She knew who was going to speak next so she never worried about having to pry her way into the conversation. She spoke about how instead of listening to respond you are listening to listen and then when it comes to you, you have time to think more about your words.

The team members recalled that even though “we didn’t come to it calm, we had to calm ourselves to sit there and listen. In a free-flowing discussion, we would have escalated instead of deescalating. In that circle, everyone would feel like at least one person has their back for everything they had to say.”
Participants also recalled how helpful the conflict profile was in allowing them to navigate conflict resolution. Several participants expressed how the workshop brought up a lot of unresolved conflict, but also made them realize that at the end of the day that they work together because they want to. Lead in “I thought that it was funny to me that things had to get messy before they got better. And it wasn’t that things were bad to begin with it was just that things had gone unexpressed for too long. Unexpressed emotions. If you have a team that believes in one another and you have a team that believes in collaborating with one another then you will get through it.”

Learning From Each Other

All educators in BC are currently dealing with an entirely new-curriculum, and for better or for worse, it has created a lot of change. Participants expressed feeling like there is no longer space to just close the door and teach, recognizing that even though they have been able to work in isolation for so long, that this option is no longer available. Participants also expressed a need to begin collaborating across all age groups, which they also acknowledged would be even more difficult as teachers of varying stages often misunderstand each other, or are not aware of the capabilities of lower or higher grade groupings. One participant recalled a time recently where she realized that what she was working on would have been better if she had collaborated on the project. She realized that she got about halfway through and her teammates voices were in her head asking her what her criteria was “and then I began wondering, is this backward design? No, it was just me and a funky idea and I asked students to sign up”.

One participant expressed her initial excitement at the prospect of the workshop series came when she found out that it was going to be grounded in research. She said
that she found it helpful to get the names of some authors to look more closely at. Lead in or connect “Any kind of learning I can glean from anyone who is passionate about anything that I love”. Another participant spoke about creativity and how when she collaborates she now realizes it’s more than just doing the same old, it’s important to have more brains to create something innovative and fun. She recalled a recent experience working with fellow staff on the school wide write “I find it’s dreadful, the same topic for the whole school, and then we all come together with the same rubric to assess: for me that’s not collaboration and it’s not what gets me going with education”. The participant went onto explain that the thing that does get her going is when people who have different opinions and strengths come together to create something cool and their ideas as a whole make the work better. “The school wide write isn’t collaboration, it’s cooperatively going through the steps of something that has to be done”. Thinking this out loud lead the participant to consider that maybe this wasn’t collaboration, and maybe she didn’t enjoy the process because there was “one person leading the thing and people just weren’t invested enough to stop her. They let her lead it in the way that she wanted to because they didn’t care.”

An Engaged Team

If you are trying to get groups to collab on things that are not interesting to them then they are not going to be invested. I am thinking that I have noticed people struggling to collaborate about certain subjects, but then not struggling at all when it is about something they are truly interested in.

Focus Group Participant: Rainbow Ridge Collaborative Team
Most participants indicated the importance of autonomy in their work. They appreciated being able to collaborate, for the most part, on what they wanted with whom they wanted, but there were times they still felt obligated to be a part of the team when they were not interested in the subject matter. When participants expressed the qualities of collaboration that allowed them to engage with the material, most answers related to either purpose or autonomy. Participants enjoyed being creative, and genuinely wanted to be engaged in what they were doing and therefore often sought out like-minded individuals who were interested in the same things to collaborate with. Lead in “That last project will go down in my memory as super positive because it was so creative. It was upcycling garbage to make instruments and then making songs out of it. Because it was a fun project, we were looking forward to getting together to do the collaboration. We all got stoked on the project and had so much fun with it”.

Participants also voiced frustration in terms of working with disengaged colleagues often viewing them as flaky, or unreliable. One participant wondered “when is it acceptable to miss? When we have a family crisis? A friend is in crisis? What is considered a crisis? We are sick (how sick is sick)? When we are too busy? We have an appointment with a health care provider? Do we aim to make appointments not during collab time? Members of the team may have different priorities which might result in some being perceived as unreliable. How do we navigate this without resentment building up? Lack of reliability is a killer for motivation in collaboration and leads to disengagement”. Many participants pointed back to the idea of creating a protocol as a means for navigating these sorts of concerns and suggested that maybe more transparency and clarity would result in those who were not engaged, not being involved, or those who
were too busy not over-committing. After the workshop series participants unanimously voiced their new increased understanding for their colleagues, but also realized the importance of hearing the real story so that they weren’t creating a false one in their own minds. They expressed wanting to see their teammates from their perspective, but also identified the necessity for the conversation to allow them to do so.

Conclusion

Both focus group and interview participants of the workshop series expressed many benefits and challenges with professional collaboration in education. All of the participants agreed that collaboration was something we both needed to do more of, because of the renewed curriculum, and also needed to learn more about. They also acknowledged that collaboration is difficult and can be messy, or emotionally uncomfortable, if done well. Much of their experiences were consistent with the literature I surveyed, while some things surprised me and were either absent from the literature, or present in the literature and absent in the experiences of the participants. One of the teams involved in the workshop series was my own team. As a participant observer, many of the comments made by the focus group and interview participants rang true for myself and my team. Although my team has been hearing me discuss many of the ideas embedded in the workshop series for quite some time now, this was the first chance they had to experience this intensive team building process as a whole. As a participant of a team involved in the workshop series I also noticed my team come together as a group and become much more effective at planning and curriculum development together. I also noticed, as many of my interview and focus group participants did, that the social climate of our group felt much less tense as we were able to be more vulnerable and real.
with each other. This new level of what I can only describe as ‘realness’ came both when dealing with tough conversations and when embracing good conflict as a means of improving our final products.

**Feedback About the Strengths of the Workshop Series**

Overall all workshop attendees who had been participants of the research both enjoyed the workshop series and felt it was an effective use of their time. Many expressed wishes that more teachers in the district would have attended, or would have the opportunity to attend in the future. Some of the positive feedback about the workshop series was the descriptive name “I was loving the title of the workshop, it really drew me in”, the three part series format, the references to the literature, and the useful activities and frameworks “I was glad that you gave us things we could actually use and look back at, it had to be something that we were going to implement because of the situations we were all in”. One participant said “I appreciated how each workshop was two hours. It gave me time to go home and think about it, talk it over with my team, and then go back and work on it”. Another participant commented about how much she enjoyed a particular framework “the box with the four things. I loved that. That is so good!!!”. Participants also frequently shared how much they appreciated having been given this opportunity for new learning “I appreciate you sharing your learning. It’s giving back to the profession and keeping us going. The learning can never stop in this job”.
Feedback About the Gaps in the Workshop Series

Having the workshop earlier in the year. When people are super fresh. At the beginning when you are just forming your team.

Moira: Interview Participant

Even though there was a lot of positive feedback about the workshop series, I specifically asked participants if they could offer any ideas and thoughts for the future. It was important to me to see the gaps that the participants had noticed in the learning, so that the workshop could be something constantly growing and improving. Some of the feedback from participants was that they wished more people had attended with their entire team, that having less time in between sessions would have been ideal, that they wished they had been given an example of some of the frameworks completed, and that some adjustments could be made in terms of timekeeping. One participant commented that “having everyone there with their entire team would make it more purposeful”. Since some individuals really wanted to attend and couldn’t get their collaborative teams to come with them, they came alone and really noticed how difficult it was to try and bring this learning back to their team. Many participants expressed that they appreciated having time between workshop sessions, but also thought that maybe less time between would have been helpful. One participant echoed this sentiment when he stated that “ideally it would have been nice to only have one week between. It would have been more compacted”. One participant commented that there could be more timekeeping, recalling that during the activity times other groups finished quickly and her group often didn’t get around to everyone having time to share. She suggested that if there was a specific time limit for the activities her group could keep better track of getting through everyone's
turn. “I felt like we didn’t have enough time to share. Maybe if there was a specific time limit so we knew how long we would have to share”.
Chapter Five: Summary, Discussion and Implications

Summary

The objective of this study was to see if, as I had suspected, there was a need for educators to learn more about collaboration. With the renewed curriculum in BC we are now being expected to co-plan, co-teach, and co-assess, without ever really being taught how. The focus of my study was the population of educators in School District #48, where I live and teach. I invited all educators in the district to attend the workshop series and invited all attendees of the workshop series to be participants in the study to follow. Participants were chosen entirely based on interest. Specifically, I was interested in discovering if it would be beneficial for educators to engage in team building strategies that I had borrowed from the literature and other professional communities, but tailored to fit the needs of educators. It was my intention to use the literature to develop a workshop series, facilitate the workshop series for teams of educators, and then follow up with these educators to see if they had experienced increased efficacy in their collaborative skills. My specific research question asked “How will engaging in the purposeful development of collaboration as a learned skill improve effectiveness within collaborative teams?”

The workshop series was held in throughout the month of May 2017 and the data was collected from the research participants at the end of the school year in late June 2017. The method of research used was entirely qualitative and my research included two focus groups, consisting of teams who attended the workshop series, as well as five interviews, consisting both of members of teams and individuals who attended the workshop series alone. Data collected from the interview recordings and the focus group
notes was coded and sorted based on recurring themes. The data from my research was gathered and analyzed in hopes that more educators in the future will be inspired to take steps towards learning more about themselves, and their teams, as collaborators and team members.

Based on the data presented and analyzed I can summarize that participants found the workshop series useful. They unanimously echoed the sentiment that they hoped I would keep running it and offering it to educators in the district. The data presented confirmed my initial hypothesis that educators were being asked to work together, but didn’t know how.

Discussion of Key Findings

“Teamwork is almost always lacking in organizations that fail and often present in those that succeed” (Lencioni, 2010, p. 3).

As the literature suggests participants of the research experienced increased efficacy after spending the time to develop their collaborative skills. The literature indicates that becoming more efficient as a team will yield positive results in terms of improved relations between team members, a greater understanding of shared values and goals, a positive outlook on and use of conflict, a more engaged team, and an increased feeling of individual accountability towards the team. In Social Intelligence (2007), Daniel Goleman suggests that climate is a key ingredient to effective teamwork stating that “like second-hand smoke, the leakage of emotions can make a bystander an innocent casualty of someone else’s toxic state” (p. 14). This sentiment is echoed throughout the literature surveyed on team building, leadership, collaboration, and education. As suggested this increased efficacy is supported in my data in a variety of ways, but most
significantly in the improvements of their relationships: both in the improved understanding of themselves as individuals and each other as teammates.

The Case for Collaboration

As suggested in the literature the research indicates both how important collaboration is becoming in education and how little we, as educators, know how to do it. Learning First (2015) published a report Reforming Teacher Professional Learning to Improve Teaching and Learning in Schools: insights from High-Performing Systems, addressing “the benefits of collaboration in driving improvements in teaching and learning in schools” (p. 26). This report suggests that high performing education systems value teacher collaboration and professional learning practices. Additionally, Voogt et al. (2011), in Teacher Learning in Collaborative Curriculum Design agrees with this idea stating that “teachers who work in collaborative teams are able to apply differentiated instruction to their lessons and together change the domain of their practice” (p. 3). The data in this study supports these statements as all participants of the study experienced the necessity for working in collaboration one interview participant stated “never again will I work in isolation, from now on I will always co-plan, co-teach, and co-assess”.

While much of the literature suggested the need in education for more collaborative practices, I was able to find little evidence to support how the field of education could go about learning how to do so. In the literature written for other professional fields I have been able to find support for my theory that collaboration and teamwork are skills that can be learned. My findings from the research suggest that the participants of the study agreed that taking the time to develop their team and themselves
as good teammates was valuable and increased their efficacy as collaborators in the field of education.

The Importance of Trust

“A key theme emerging in the practices of creative teachers was the notion of intellectual risk taking… a willingness to try out new ideas and approaches in their classrooms. This openness to approaching thing differently allows them to come up with new and interesting approaches to teaching.”

Henriksen, 2015, p. 20

In the field of education, we have a lot of autonomy over our professional development and my advice to teams who want to get more of their staff, or district on board would be just to keep being successful. Generally, educators want to be the best that they can be and will search for an access point to the conversation. We have to be mindful that not everyone is where we are in our learning journey and by making our learning visible and accessible is the only way to draw others in. The literature on teamwork, leadership, and education all suggest that trust is an essential component for developing healthy working relationships and encouraging creativity. In Primal Leadership (2002), Daniel Goleman states that an important ingredient to trust is looking inward and “taking stock of your real self-starting with an inventory of your talents and passions--the person you actually are as a leader. This can be more difficult than it might seem... it requires a great deal of self-awareness” (p. 128). The study found this to be true in their experiences after the workshop series. Collectively the participants found that by understanding themselves better made it easier to develop an understanding of and a sense of empathy for others.
Conflict: Autonomy and Accountability

*I thought that things didn't always need to be shared, but things have been a lot better since the circle, and since we have begun to address politics more openly.*

*Jessica: Interview Participant*

Using conflict as a driver for creativity in collaboration is a common theme of the literature surveyed on leadership and especially team building. Although there is not much to support the idea of using conflict constructively in education, a lot of evidence to support this idea came out of the data gathered. Participants spoke passionately about their experiences with both constructive conflict and ridding their workplaces of politics and gossip since attending the workshop series. Patrick Lencioni (2010) in *Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, suggested that merely talking about how team members prefer to deal with conflict can be the most helpful thing a team does—in regards to effectively using conflict. The data gathered supports this idea, as participants experienced this new transparency and way of purposefully going about incorporating conflict as one of the aspect of the workshop that helped them the most.

Being able to use conflict to their advantage is something participants have acknowledged as allowing them to develop a greater feeling of accountability towards their collaborative team. In her interview, June reflected that “*by getting everything out in the open our team was more able to understand each other and the needs of everyone on the team. Because we felt less alone we were more jazzed to contribute and to do our best on the things we committed to*.”
Drive: Engaged Educators

“People believe that the gift is the ability itself, yet what feeds it is constant endless curiosity and challenge-seeking.”

Carol Dweck (2008)

The literature on engagement suggests that there are three main drivers for motivation: autonomy, purpose, and mastery (Pink, 2009). This idea is supported by the research with many of the participants stating how important purpose and autonomy are to them. This leads me to wonder about mastery and where it fits into education. I have recently brought up this idea in recent conversation with fellow educators, and have noticed that individuals generally seem to be driven more by one of these three aspects than the other two. The reason this topic became something I have been so interested in, is that I am primarily driven by my desire for mastery, so when others didn’t express the same need it got me thinking. Considering the population of this study was entirely educators, I wonder if individuals who are primarily purpose driven are attracted to the field of education. This is a possible explanation for why so many of my participants express purpose as their primary motivator with autonomy as a close second.

Limitations

Limitations to the validity of this study includes the fact that both workshop attendees and participants were self-selected. Because of this fact there was not an accurate representation of district employees. All of the participants consisted of elementary school staff, and only one of the participants were male. Although there were a few administrative staff, district staff, union staff, and itinerant staff, there was no high
school representation at all. There was also no representation of clerical staff, despite having been invited as well. School District #48 is a widespread district — spanning all the way from Darcy to Britannia Beach— but only Squamish staff chose to attend. This was to be expected as it is a long drive to Squamish to attend a workshop series in the evening if you are from Whistler or Pemberton. Staff from schools in the north have expressed interest in the workshop series to be offered closer to them in the future so that attendance would be possible.

Another limitation to this study was due to the fact that several individuals chose to attend without the rest of their team. These individuals found it difficult to bring their learning back to their collaborative teams who hadn’t experienced the workshop series themselves. Although reliability and validity were maximized in this study by the use of member checking and triangulation of the data, it was difficult to find other cases similar with which to compare the data findings to. It would be useful to continue gathering data from future workshops (of this workshop series) given in order to compare it with the data collected from this study.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

The necessity for collaboration between educators is increasing. The release of the renewed curriculum in BC has inspired such massive change in the way we design curriculum that it is unsustainable to continue working in isolation. Because we are now being encouraged — and even in some cases expected — to participate in collaboration with our colleagues it is essential that as a profession we take the time to learn how to do that effectively. Education is a field in which we spend the majority of our time with our students and therefore we have to find time outside of the school day to collaborate. In
order to maintain healthy work-life balance and avoid burn-out it is essential that we learn how to make the most of this time.

A next step in this research could be to develop a playbook for teams of teachers to use to guide them through the process of developing their team and learning how to collaborate effectively. Another option might be for the BCTF to either develop a workshop series that teaches teachers how to collaborate and build team, or to adapt an inquiry workshop to include sessions on learning how to work together. It would also be possible to adapt the workshop series into an online course that teams of educators could enroll in and work through, in the same way they can with other learning such as developmental theory, or mathematical mindsets.

This research could be enriched by the exploration of the effective use of conflict among educators specifically. As this was the area most lacking in the literature. There is a lot of literature in education about the importance of collaboration, but I had difficulty finding much on how to collaborate effectively.

Lastly, as many participants commented that they wished their colleagues could have participated in this workshop series, I will continue to refine and facilitate it as requested across School District #48 and beyond.

**Personal Implications for Practice**

It was my personal experiences with professional collaboration in education that lead me to look more closely into the subject. As previously mentioned I had a transformative collaboration experience when being asked to collaborate on a project with a team of educators I didn’t know very well. It was because of the potential within the team, and lack of familiarity with each other that lead us to work on building our team
rather than focusing on the product we were intended to produce. This is a story I retell passionately and often, not because of how easy the experience was, but rather how difficult. Even though as a team we worked hard at understanding each other and developing protocols for discussions and idea generating, and in the end, we did produce a quality product, the process was emotionally exhausting and in my opinion would not have been sustainable. During this operation, there were a lot of different personality types in the room, all with varying preferences in regards to dealing with conflict, degrees of comfort with technology, and propensity to be heard in discussion. As it tends to happen there was a person in my group that I personally had difficulties working with, and regardless of how much I understood her and where she was coming from, it always felt as though she was purposely targeting everything I had to say and systematically shooting down my contributions and suggestions. Although we had difficulties working together, I respect her as a colleague and had a desire to get the work done with minimal “boat-rocking”. When I tell this story people always ask me what I did, and I always respond with the truth, “I got through it, and then I cried”. This experience allowed me to question how we, as a profession could be better. How could we minimize emotional distress, while maximizing creativity? I knew that for the most part in education I would be able to choose my team from this point on, but I still think that if this team had remained together, over time we would have been able to work through some of these types of issues without having to “vote someone off the island”.

**Conclusion**

Generally, educators want to improve their practice to the best of their abilities and almost anyone will agree that two, three, four, or even five heads are better than one.
Despite this common understanding many educators either choose to close their doors and work alone, or choose to work in silos rather than across age groupings or subject areas. While much of the renewed curriculum in BC is focused on cross curricular competencies and multi age groupings many educators are continuing to choose the path of least resistance by working primarily with seemingly likeminded colleagues. If education is to keep up with progress and innovation, educators are going to have to get more and more creative in terms of their curriculum design, and that cannot continue to be done the way it has been in the past. The process is important, but so is the product, and if education is to produce innovation at the rate that is both being expected of us and the rate that we are expecting of ourselves then it is going to be important that all educators learn how to collaborate. If it becomes a common understanding that collaboration is a skill that we can grow and develop, then educators will do their best to improve their own practices by working on growing and developing that skill both in themselves and within their teams.
References


http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13450600500467290


http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational
leadership/nov12/vol70/num03/Keeping-improvement-in-Mind.aspx

Call to action: Bringing the profession back in Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves


http://www.eblib.com


Collaboration in Education

Porter, C., Osmond-Johnson, P., Faubert, B., Zeichner, K., Hobbs-Johnson, A.,


Voogt, J; Westbroek, H; Handelzalts, A; Walraven, A; McKenney, S; Pieters, J; de Vries, B. (2011). Teacher Learning in Collaborative Curriculum Design. Teaching and

Appendix A: Colleague Recruitment Script

Good afternoon. As many of you know, I am currently working on my Master’s degree at Vancouver Island University and have developed this workshop as a part of that research. I am interested in continuing with this work of helping educators to plan collaboratively in a sustainable way. We all have so much to do with so little time to do it in, it is my hope that by putting into practice some of the skills we have worked on here that we will save ourselves valuable time and stress by designing the innovative curriculum that we can all be proud to be a part of.

At this stage of my research, I would like to invite you all to participate in a semi-structured half hour interview as well as an hour long focus group with your team. Please do not feel pressured. This is completely voluntary and if you decide not to, that’s okay. I encourage you to continue to use the skills you have learned here in your own setting regardless of your decision to participate or not to participate in the subsequent interviews. The purpose of this study is to analyze the experiences of educators who have attended my workshop series on professional collaboration in education. I am curious to see what aspects of the workshop were helpful, why, and how individuals were able to integrate these skills into their own settings.

The findings will be used in my graduate thesis as partial requirements for the Masters of Educational Leadership program at Vancouver Island University.

I’ll host the interviews at mutually agreed upon locations and at times that work for those involved. This will likely be at your school or a coffee shop during a time that is convenient for you. Information from the interview will be confidential and I encourage you to think of a pseudonym you would like to be referred to as as I will not be using your real names in my research. I will also refrain from using any identifying information about you or your school.
In the interview I will video-record your responses to the questions I ask and in the focus group I will record your conversations in the form of researcher’s notes on my laptop.

In the interview the questions will be fairly open ended leaving you to decide how much or how little detail you would like to contribute. If a question makes you uncomfortable, you do not have to answer it. I will be asking multiple questions to elicit your experiences working in your collaborative teams both before and after your involvement in the workshop.

In the focus group I will provide occasional discussion questions and observe the ensuing conversation. The purpose of these questions will be to observe your group interacting in open discussion time as well as to discover some of the collective experiences you've had with the workshop material.

If you have any questions about this research project, or would like more information, please feel free to contact me at the email address below.

Katrina Lowe  
VIU Masters Student, Vancouver Island University  
klowe@sd48.bc.ca

My university supervisor, Paige Fisher, can be contacted if you have any concerns or questions about the research and do not feel comfortable talking to me directly.

250-753-3245, local 2002  
paige.fisher@viu.ca

Please indicate in the research consent form whether you wish to be a participant of my study or not. If you do not want to provide consent do not return the form. You have the right to withdraw your consent to participate in the research at any time.

Thank you for considering taking the time to participate in this study.
Appendix B: Colleague Consent Form

Collaboration as a learned skill

*Educators in Sea to Sky working together to become better collaborators*

**Principal Investigator**
Katrina Lowe  
Master of Education Student  
Vancouver Island University  
XXX-XXX-XXXX  
klowe@sd48.bc.ca

**Student Supervisor**
Paige Fisher  
Department of Education  
Vancouver Island University  
250-753-3245, local 2002  
paige.fisher@viu.ca

**Purpose of the Study:**
In addition to being a classroom Teacher in the Sea to Sky School District, I am also a student in the Masters of Education in Educational Leadership program at Vancouver Island University (VIU). You all have chosen to attend my workshop series entitled “Collaboration as a Learned Skill” and I hope you have all learned something valuable in the time you spent doing so. As part of my program I am also conducting a study, in which I plan to meet with you and your team to observe what, of this new learning, you have could apply and use in your setting. The intent of this project is to work with teachers to hone their collaboration skills within their collaborative teams by creating a series of workshops. Teachers will have the opportunity to attend these workshops and learn some collaborative skills. I plan to follow up with teams choosing to participate to discover what they experience after they put these methods into place in their settings by conducting focus groups and one on one interviews.

**Study Procedures:**
In this study, Educators who attend the collaboration workshop series are being invited to voluntarily participate in a face-to-face half hour semi-structured interview as well as an hour-long focus group, as part of my research. If you agree, you would be asked questions concerning your personal experiences while participating in workshop and your continued use of the learning obtained there. The questions will focus on your perspective of the workshops, your feelings as you brought some of the techniques learned there into your setting, and any feedback for refining the process.

1. By returning this consent form to Katrina Lowe, you consent to participate in the study.
2. During the interview, I will first read a scripted introduction outlining the purpose of the study, and then you will be asked a variety of questions that will encourage you to share your professional collaboration experiences.
3. Interviews and focus groups will take place at a mutually agreed upon location (either the school you work at or a coffee shop). Dates will be arranged to fit your schedule.
4. With your permission, the interviews will be audio/video-recorded to ensure accurate transcription of responses, and the focus group will be transcribed on the researcher’s laptop.

5. You will be asked to refrain from stating any identifying information about yourself and the school you work at. You will also be asked to create a pseudonym, and will be referred to by this name in the study.

6. I will be transcribing the information I collect from the interviews for analysis, and publish the results in a thesis document.

7. To ensure accuracy of the data collected, a copy of transcribed responses will be given. You will be asked to take up to one week to review, revise, or remove content as you see appropriate.

Potential Risks:
The information collected during the interview would likely be uncontroversial, and thus the research poses only a very small risk of harm to the participants. Although I will use a pseudonym in my research, please know that you may still be identified based on the information you provide. Additionally even though I will be anonymizing the data, there is no way to ensure that all group members will keep the identity of participants confidential. Accordingly, anonymity cannot be guaranteed. Some of the interview questions may cause discomfort. Should this occur, you may skip any questions that you may feel uncomfortable answering.

Potential Benefits:
The process of participating in focus groups and interviews may help participants to reflect more deeply on the learning and their collaborative process.

Confidentiality:
If you choose to participate in this study, all records of your participation would be confidential. Individual names will not be recorded in the data collected in this study; a pseudonym will be used in place of real names. As mentioned, even though a pseudonym will be used, please know that you may be identified based on the information that you provide. With your permission, the interview would be audio/video recorded and later transcribed into text and the focus group will be transcribed by me on my laptop throughout the discussion. You will be provided with a copy of the transcription and invited to make changes as you wish. The data will be stored in the principal investigator’s password protected computer. Signed consent forms and paper copies of interview transcripts will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my home. Raw data will only be accessed by the principal investigator and thesis supervisor. All data will be destroyed within a 18 months of the completion of this study, on January 31st, 2019. Electronic data will be deleted and hard copy data will be shredded.

Results:
The results of this study will be published in my Master’s thesis.

Contact for Information about the study:
COLLABORATION IN EDUCATION

If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact me, Katrina Lowe by telephone at XXX-XXX-XXXX or my email klowe@sd48.bc.ca

Consent:
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, and without explanation. You may also choose to not answer specific questions without penalty if you choose. You will be provided with a transcription of the interview to review and revise over a period of one week. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all information you provided during the interview would be withdrawn from the study and destroyed.

I have read and understand the information provided above, and hereby consent to participate in this research under the following conditions:

I consent to participate in this research. Yes No

I consent to being identified by pseudonym in the products of the research. Yes No

I consent to the interview being audio/video recorded. Yes No

I consent to the researcher using quotations from my interview in the thesis paper. Yes No

Participant Name
________________________________________________________________________

Participant Signature
________________________________________________________________________

Date _______________________________________________________________________

I, Katrina Lowe, promise to adhere to the procedures described in this consent form.

Principal Investigator Signature __________________________ Date ____________

Concerns about your treatment in the research:
If you have any concerns about your treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the VIU Research Ethics Board by telephone at 250-740-6631 or by email at reb@viu.ca.

Participants will be provided a copy of the signed consent form.
Appendix C: Interview Protocol- Introduction and Conclusion

**Collaboration as a learned skill**  
*Educators in Sea to Sky working together to become better collaborators.*

**Principal Investigator**  
Katrina Lowe  
Master of Education Student  
Vancouver Island University  
XXX-XXX-XXXX  
klowe@sd48.bc.ca

**Student Supervisor**  
Paige Fisher  
Department of Education  
Vancouver Island University  
250-753-3245, local 2002  
paige.fisher@viu.ca

**Scripted Interview Introduction:**  
This is a voluntary interview and you may withdraw from the study at any point. If you are ever uncomfortable with a question, you can choose to not answer without penalty. With your permission, the information will be audio-recorded and kept completely confidential. Pseudonyms will be used at all times in the study, and if you would like to choose your own, you may do so at this time. You will be referred to only by this pseudonym in this research. During the interview please try not to include information specific enough to be able identify yourself or others by. I will not include any identifying information from you or your setting in my study.

Thank you for taking the time to be interviewed. Your participation will help me to refine my workshop on collaboration, as well as gain a greater understanding of what is necessary to help educators collaborate effectively in the future. It is my hope that the data obtained here will help the educators in our district to plan together in a sustainable way.

**Scripted Interview Conclusion:**  
Thank you for taking the time to answer the questions. I will be transcribing your answers and will provide a copy of your response and one week to review, revise, or remove content as you see appropriate, along with a copy of your submitted consent form. You can still choose to opt out of the study at any point before I publish the data. The results of the study will be made available to you upon completion. Please feel free to contact me at any time. Again, thank you for your time.
Appendix D: Interview Questions

Collaboration as a learned skill
Educators in Sea to Sky working together to become better collaborators.

Principal Investigator
Katrina Lowe
Master of Education Student
Vancouver Island University
XXX-XXX-XXXX
klowe@sd48.bc.ca

Student Supervisor
Paige Fisher
Department of Education
Vancouver Island University
250-753-3245, local 2002
paige.fisher@viu.ca

Learning Intention:
The renewed curriculum has given educators the freedom to plan in an authentic way that makes sense for ourselves and for our students. Investing time and emotional energy into our collaborative teams will give us the ability to do so more efficiently, effectively, and sustainably.

Essential Question:
By engaging in the purposeful development of collaboration as a learned skill, can we improve effectiveness within our collaborative teams?

(Focus Group) Warm-Up Circle:
As we go around the circle share how you are feeling today and one thing you have learned from this process.

Focus Group Questions:
1. What have you been learning about professional collaboration?
2. How is your group doing with the collaboration process?
3. What are your team’s next steps as collaborators?

Interview Questions:
1. Tell me about your initial thoughts on the workshop series.
2. What did you hope to gain from attending these workshops?
3. How have you put this learning into practice in your setting?
   a. Please expand on your answer: what has worked and what hasn’t?
4. Tell me about a stand out moment in your collaboration experiences with your team?
5. Describe your most positive collaboration experience.
6. Have you had any negative collaboration experiences? If so, could you describe
that for me?
7. Describe what collaboration means to you.
8. Have you developed any specific connections with your peers as a result of some of the exercises introduced in the workshop?
   a. Have these connections helped you?
   b. Can you describe this for me?
9. Describe an ideal collaboration meeting to you.
10. What are some of your suggestions for improvements to the workshop series?
11. Do you have anything else you would like to share before we conclude our interview?
The renewed inquiry based curriculum demands that educators become capable of engaging effectively and closely in collaboration with each other.

**ACTION PLAN:**

- Three two hour facilitated sessions designed to give your team the tools to collaborate more effectively in the future.
- Team building strategies to help educators keep up to the standards we have set for ourselves.
- Learning to use team members’ strengths and weaknesses to create sustainable and innovative growth.

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION:**
By engaging in the purposeful development of collaboration as a learned skill can we improve effectiveness within our collaborative teams?

**LEARNING INTENTION:**
The renewed curriculum has given educators the freedom to plan in an authentic way that makes sense for ourselves and our students, but engaging in learning to collaborate as a skill can give us the ability to do so.

**NOTE:** Personal computers and personal or school google account recommended.
**RSVP:** Katrina Lowe by **Tuesday April 18th** to klowe@sd48.bc.ca or **XXX-XXX-XXXX**