Chapter 3 Literature Review: Collaboration

3.0 Introduction

The sections below discuss collaboration, the second organising concept of this dissertation. The five sections are:

(i)   Collaboration – the extent of use of the term

(ii)   Benefits of collaboration

(iii)   The form of collaboration amongst teachers

(iv)   Criticism of collaboration

(v)   Collaboration as process – team building

3.1 Collaboration - The extent of use of the term

Collaboration is a part of many relationships in teaching. Nunan (1992,1) lists teachers, learners, researchers and curriculum specialists as just some of the people who work together in schools. Collaborators may not even be members of the same institution. One such example is provided by Deketelare and Kelchtermans (1996) who describe Deketelare's work with a group of teachers from different schools. Collaboration was used as a means of developing and evaluating curriculum materials. The skills of the classroom teachers and their knowledge of their students when combined with the skills of the curriculum developer resulted in better quality teaching materials being produced. Working with curriculum developer stimulated the professional development of the teachers and provided a means of piloting the material for Deketelare. The use of collaboration as a term and practice is so extensive that Hargreaves (1995, 150) describes it as a metaparadigm, an overarching principle of 'action, planning, culture, development, organization and research'. One source of popularity of collaboration as a term can be traced to school improvement and school development literature along with that on teacher development

(Hargreaves 1994). In their review of educational policies in OECD countries, Hopkins and Stern (1996, 514) state 'Teacher quality flourishes in schools that are organised to support good teaching and collaboration'. They also suggest besides schools promoting collaboration, quality in individual teachers is marked by a capacity for teamwork including planning and teaching. Grimmett and Crehan (1992) suggest the popularity of a similar term, 'collegiality', is such that it has acquired a 'mystique' and trace its use to Little's[1] study published in 1981. However, beyond the meaning of working together the uses vary and often there can be differences in status and power of collaborators that are not always clearly identified.

3.1 Benefits of collaboration

The many uses of the term collaboration are matched by the many benefits that are claimed to derive from collegial relations. Given that the aim of developing teachers is ultimately focused on better learning, perhaps the most significant benefit is an improvement in student behaviour and achievement that is reported in Inger (1993). The same author also suggests it leads to increased teacher satisfaction and adaptability. Adding to this list, Hargreaves (1995) includes moral support and increased efficiency. In effective collaboration, moral support can lead to a will to deal with the teaching problems recalcitrant learners sometimes present. It can lead to the generation of a wider range of teaching options. Efficiency is increased as teachers working in the same area avoid unnecessary duplication of effort. The public airing of teaching issues besides encouraging moral support can also lead to respect and influence in the case of successful instances of teaching (Little 1987). Under the norms of privatism much good teaching goes on unacknowledged. Hargreaves

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[1] Little, Judith Warren (1981) 'The power of organizational setting: School norms and staff development', Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Research Association, Los Angeles, CA.

suggests feelings of overload may be reduced if working together encourages a sense of ownership and control. Similarly, collaboration may reduce the uncertainty that exists in teaching by enabling realistic targets to be set. A further benefit might be an impetus to continual improvement in teaching as teacher development is prompted through interaction and reflection.

3.3 The form of collaboration amongst teachers

Looking at the form that collaboration between teachers may take, Judith Little (1990) creates a continuum ranging from those activities that are compatible with teacher independence and autonomy to those that require interdependent action and the notion of collective autonomy.

Figure 3.1 Little's Independence - Interdependence Continuum
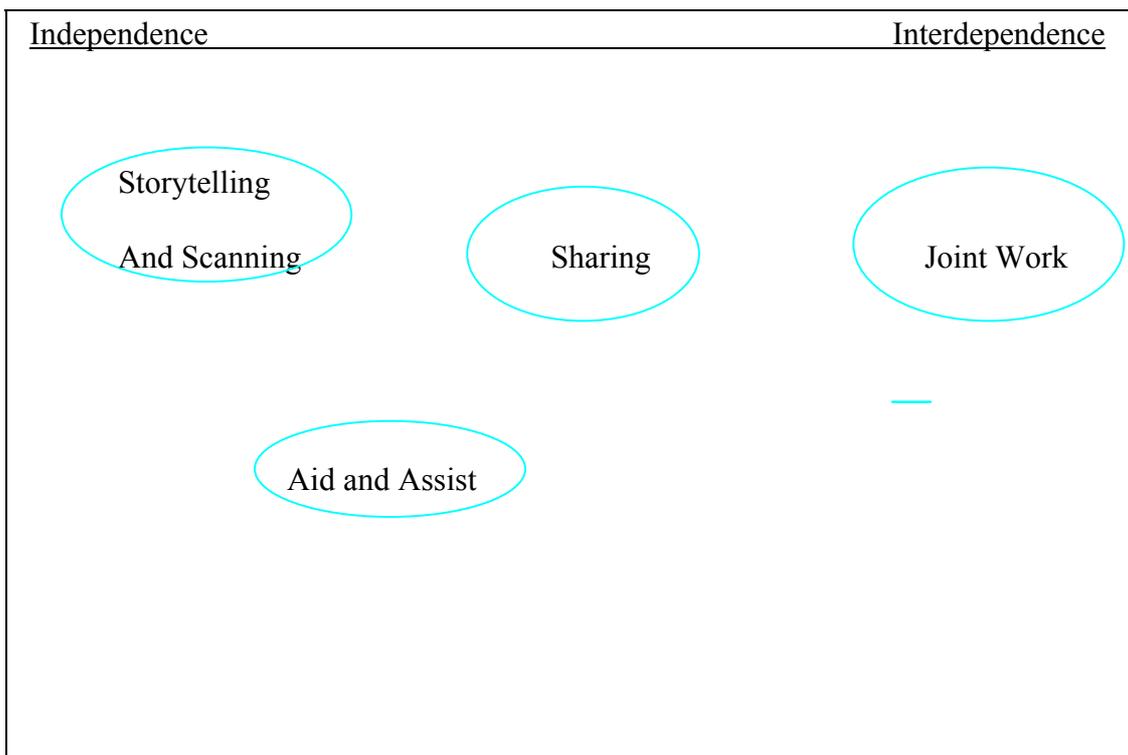
from Little (1991, 512)

The practice of exchanging stories about the classroom has virtually no impact on individual autonomy. Although Little suggests its contribution to teacher development

is limited, she refers to anthropological studies that points to storytelling as a means of building a group or providing a form of instruction. At another level is aid and assistance, which usually depends on a teacher initiating a request for help. This sometimes renders it problematic as requesting help can be interpreted as a lack of competence or can call status into question. A deeper level of collaboration is the sharing of materials or ideas on a routine basis. Potentially, there is a greater opportunity for teaching practice to be discussed and the opportunity for public scrutiny when this occurs. At the interdependence end of the continuum is joint work, which Little (1990, 519) describes as 'shared responsibility for the work of teaching' and 'a collective conception of autonomy'. It derives from teachers' decisions to plan and work together in a way that influences their individual work. She gives an example of teachers who meet to discuss curriculum priorities. However, she also notes that within teachers' work there may be few pressures to collaborate of necessity. This is supported by Cohen (1981, 163) who suggests that teaming in schools is 'highly unstable and informal'. While joint work may be the result of voluntary associations, Little states external change may also be a source of pressure to collaborate. She identifies the introduction of the national curriculum in Britain as one such pressure.

3.4 Criticism of collaboration

While there are benefits to be gained from collaboration, there are problems when descriptive studies are taken as prescriptive measures. Simply implementing measures successful elsewhere ignores the importance of context. The limits of collaboration also need to be acknowledged. Hargreaves (1995, 155) lists some of the negative attributes of collaboration. For example, while timetabling meetings can ensure all participants are available at the same time, making meetings compulsory can result in

them being held to fulfil administrative requirements with no useful business to conduct. Groups can reinforce existing practices and encourage conformity if controversial areas are avoided. This may be a deliberate attempt at co-option and groups may be formed by administrators with the sole purpose of securing acceptance of external reforms. Hargreaves (1994) uses the distinction between internally generated and externally imposed collaboration to distinguish between collaborative cultures and contrived collaboration. A collaborative culture is seen as a bottom up initiative arising from teachers' desire or need to work together to accomplish tasks, whereas contrived collaboration is seen as a top down strategy to achieve a particular goal or affect. From the table below the characteristics of the two paradigms seem diametrically opposed. However, both collaborative cultures and contrived collaboration can exist in the same organisation. It is perhaps unfortunate that Hargreaves chose the term 'contrived'. It has a negative connotation of trickery and falseness that could deter some people from making use of his analysis.

Table 3.1   Collaborative Culture and Contrived Collegiality

Collaborative Cultures	Contrived Collegiality
Spontaneous	Administratively regulated
Voluntary	Compulsory
Development oriented	Implementation orientated
Pervasive across time and space	Fixed in time and space
Unpredictable	Predictable

Hargreaves suggests that while contrived collaboration may encourage teachers to work together, it often masks a division of labour. The conception and planning of curriculum and assessment reside with administrators while teachers are held

responsible for programme implementation. The amount of discretion teachers have is reduced with their role being diminished to that of technicians. **3.5 Collaboration as Process - Team Building**

Collaboration is a basic feature of human society, and for some people it is a defining feature. Despite this fact working together effectively as a team does not happen automatically (Bell 1992). For example, Little (1987) points out teachers unaccustomed to curricular planning together often feel frustrated by their first efforts. Teams may go through several stages of development. These stages are described by Murgatroyd and Morgan (1992, 150) as forming, storming, norming, performing and finally either transforming or conforming. These stages are not automatic, nor can it be assumed that all groups pass successfully through them. Some groups do not survive the storm while others may experience 'collective regression'(Granstrom 1996).The group may feel itself to be helpless and dependent due to an inability to deal with a situation because of a lack of competence or resources. Another way of looking at how individuals respond to the difficulties of working with other people is suggested in Thomas (1992). He suggests that there is an autonomy-teamwork continuum with people preferring either more autonomy or more teamwork depending on how people attribute the cause of the stress or problem. Individuals who see the problem as lying with the personal qualities of others in the team would try to increase their status and autonomy. Individuals who see the problem as lying with the situation would be more likely to opt for team solutions. He uses the notion of role to describe to possible conflicts that arise in teams due to differing expectations. Lack of role definition or role ambiguity may also result in problems.